Interleaved Annotated Classics.

COWPER

THE TASK

BOOK I.



THE SOFA



TEXT

With Introduction, Critical Remarks, Analysis, Copious Explanatory Notes, Paraphrase, Explanations, Model Questions and Answers, University Questions with Hints, &c &c



EDITED BY

Some distinguished Graduates (European and Indian) of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Calcutta, Madras and the Punjab.



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The Publishers.

INTRODUCTION.

Cowper's Life and Works.

WILLIAM COWPER was born Nov. 26, 1731, at Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire, of which place his father was the rector. He was of an ancient and even illustrious race, being the grand-nephew of Lord Chancellor Cowper.

Cowper's life was an unhappy one, and containing but few incidents. While only six, he lost his mother, whose memory he cherished with the fondest affection, as we may learn from his lines "On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture." He was brought up at Westminster school, where his school-fellows were Coleman, Lloyd, Churchill, Warren Hastings, &c., all of whom distinguished themselves afterwards one way or other.

In 1754 he was articled to an attorney, with whom he remained three years, one of his desk companions, being Thurlow, afterwards celebrated as the Lord Chancellor Thurlow. But Cowper did not profit much by his law studies, and never became a lawyer. At the age of thirtyone he was nominated to the clerkship of the journals of the House of Lords, but the very idea of making a public appearance so much alarmed his shy and nervous spirit that he fell into a deep despondency, and attempted to put an end to his own life. Towards the end of 1763 this despondency ripened into madness, and it became necessary to place him under medical care and supervision. He recovered the use of his faculties some months after, though it was evident to his friends that any active career in life had become an impossibility.

In 1765 Cowper removed to Huntingdon, where he made the acquaintance of a clergyman of the name of Unwin, in whose family he became an inmate. On the

death of Mr. Unwin next year, the poet removed, with the widow, to Olney, in Buckinghamshire, where the two lived till 1786, on terms of the most intimate friendship. At Olney he suffered a relapse of the malady in 1773 and the two following years, owing, it is said, to the gloomy counsel and ministrations of the Rev. John Newton, the Calvinistic preacher of that place. His recovery was entirely due to the untiring and tender nursing of Mrs. Unwin.

The ten years from 1775 to 1785 were the happiest years of the poet's life, and also the most productive in a literary point of view. Among a variety of rural occupations,——gardening, carpentering, and taming hares,——he found time to study and write poetry. His first volume of poems, containing his minor poems,—*Truth*, *Expostulation*, *Table Talk &c.*—appeared in 1782. About this time Cowper made the friendship of Lady Austen, and it is to her influence that we owe the humorous ballad of *John Gilpin*, and Cowper's greatest poem, *The Task*. His *Translation* of Homer came out in 1791.

Meanwhile evil days had again come upon him. In 1786 he had removed to Weston, where he again relapsed into his old malady. Mrs. Unwin, the companion and comforter of his life during 30 years, died in 1796, but he seemed almost unconscious of it; indeed into such a deep despondency had he fallen, that it could not be made deeper. Only a year before his death he wrote his last poem, *The Castaway*, the most forlorn and desponding poem ever penned, describing, with a terrible energy, the gloom of the writer's mind. At last on April 25, 1800, his troubled spirit passed away.

Chronological list of Cowper's chief works.

1. Anti-Thelypthora, 1781. 2. The Table Talk, 1782. 3. Expostulation, 1782. 4. The Progress of Error, 1782. 5. John Gilpin, 1782. 6. Tirocinium, 1784. 7. The Task, 1785. 8. A Translation of Homer, 1791. 9. Gay's Fables in Latin, 1799. 10. The Castaway, 1799.

Cowper and his Times.

Goethe said, if you would understand an author, you must understand his age. There can be no more interesting or profitable study than that which seeks to determine by what principles, methods, chances, and changes, by what impulses of the mind and heart, a great personality impresses itself upon the intellectual history of a nation, and feeds it with moral truth and human passion.

Cowper was born in a world from which the spirit of poetry seemed to have fled. 'Spiritual religion was almost extinct. The Church was little better than a political force. The clergy were idle and neglectful of their duties, often sordid and corrupt, fanatics in their Toryism, and cold, rationalistic, and almost heathen in their preachings. The society of the day was one of hard and heartless polish and fashionable immorality, devoted to a giddy round of theatre-going, card-parties, and balls. Among the common people religion was almost extinct. Ignorance and brutality reigned in the cottage. Drunkenness and profanity reigned in palace and cottage alike. It was the time when Chesterfield, "with his soulless culture, his courtly graces, and his fashiohable immoralities, was about the highest type of an English gentleman." "It was," as Goldwin Smith says, "the age of the criminal law which hanged men for petty thefts, age of life-long imprisonment for debt, of the stocks and the pillory, of the unreformed prison system, of the press gang, of unrestrained tyranny and savagery at public schools.'' Moreover it was the time of the iniquitous slave trade, in which even religious men took part without any scruple. Cowper's constitutionally tender nature revolted against the corruptions of the day and sheltered itself under the wings of the church that orignated solely for the purpose of reforming the abuses."

Cowper's Religion and Political Faith.

Cowper's sympathies were with Methodism. Puritanism had come into violent collision with the temporal power, and had contracted a character fiercely political and revolutionary. Methodism fought only against unbelief, vice, and the coldness of the establishment; it was in no way political, much less revolutionary.

The pessimism with which Cowper has been charged, seems to have been the outcome, partly of the hypochondria from which he constantly suffered, and partly of his theology, which inculcated and emphasized the irretrievable corruption of human nature, ever pursued by the vengeance of an angry God.

By the recoil from the atheism of the French Revolution the leaders of Methodism, including Wesley himself, were drawn to the Tory side. Cowper always remained in principle what he had been born, a Whig, an unrevolutionary Whig, an "Old Whig" to adopt the phrase made canonical by Burke,

> 'Tis liberty alone that gives the flower
> Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume,
> And we are weeds without it. All constraint
> Except what wisdom lays on evil men
> Is evil.'

The sentiment of these lines, which were familiar and dear to Cobden, is tempered by judicious professions of loyalty to a king who rules in accordance with the law. At one time Cowper was inclined to regard the government of George III. as a repetition of that of Charles I, absolutist in the State and reactionary in the Church: but the progress of revolutionary opinions evidently increased his loyalty, as it did that of many other Whigs. to the good Tory king.

Cowper as a Poet.

Secret of his Strength and Popularity.

The qualities which give Cowper a high place as a poet it is not difficult to define. For humour and quiet satire; for appreciation of natural beauty and domestic life; for strong good sense and devout piety; for public spirit and occasional sublimity; for gentle and noble sentiment; for fine descriptive powers employed with skill on outward scenes and on character; for ease and colloquial freedom of style; and for the strength and

harmony of his later versification especially, he has rarely been equalled: and for these qualities combined he has never been surpassed. And it is this combination that most excites admiration. *His satire is often keen but never personal.* He is earnestly religious, but his religion never blunts his sensibilities to the glories of nature; nor does it ever, though eminently spiritual, unfit him to appreciate the sacredness of human rights or the fault of wrong-doing. He has evidently been polished by intercourse with the world, but he has preserved a very unworldly degree of purity and simplicity. Never was poet more lonely or sad, and yet by none has domestic happiness been more impressively described. With the ripeness and decision of age, he has the sportiveness and susceptibility of youth. Nor is it easy to decide whether we are attracted most by the excellence of each quality or by the softness and harmony of the whole. No one of these qualities, however, nor the combination of them all is sufficient to explain the healthy influence he exerted on English poetry or the love with which he is now regarded. *He is practically the founder of the modern school of poets*—an honour he owes chiefly to his reality and naturalness. It is this excellence which gives attractiveness to all he has written. Pope's poems are, at least, as finished as the best of Cowper's and more finished than most of his earlier pieces. Young is often more finished than most of his earlier pieces. Young is often apparently as religious, sometimes as merry, and certainly as witty. Thomson's pictures of nature have greater variety and more ideal beauty than Cowper's. But Pope's poetry is art; Cowper's nature. Young's religion and mirth seem to belong to two different men. From every line Cowper has written the very man beams forth, always natural, consistent, and unaffected; while *his descriptions of nature excite sensation rather than ideas and the poet lives and moves in every scene.* In short, his poetry has the polish and vigour of the eighteenth century, the warmth and feeling of the seventeenth, with a natural-

ness and a reality all his own. And this last, the naturalness and a reality of a loving, gentle, devout heart, is the secret of his strength.

Nature and Man in English poetry—Cowper the forerunner of the Neo-Romantic School of poets.

The Poets have always worked on two great subjects—Man and Nature. The subject of the Elizabethan poets was Man as influenced by the Passions, and it was treated from the side of natural feeling. This was fully and splendidly done by Shakespeare. But after a time this subject was treated in an extravagant and sensational manner, and the representation of the passions tended to become, and did become unnatural or fantastic. Milton alone redeemed the subject from this vicious excess. He wrote in a grave and natural manner of the passions of the human heart, and he made strong the religious passions of love of God, sorrow for sin, and others, in English poetry. But with him the subject of man as influenced by the passions died for a time. Dryden, Pope, and their followers, turned to another. They left the passions aside, and wrote of the things in which the intellect and the conscience, the social and political instincts in man were interested. Thus, up to the age of Pope, the subject of Man was alone treated, and many phases it went through. There remained the subject of Nature and of man's relation to it; that is, of the visible landscape, sea, and sky, and all that men feel in contact with them. Natural scenery had been hitherto only used as a background to the picture at human life. About the midle of the 18th century it began to occupy a much larger space in poetry, and after a time grew to occupy a distinct place of its own apart from Man.

The first trace of a pleasure in rural things and in the emotions they awaken is to be found among some of the Puritan poets of the 17th century. But Nature is only, as in the works of Marvell and Milton, incidentally introduced. The first poem devoted to natural description

appeared, while Pope was yet alive, in the very midst of the town poetry. It was the *Seasons* 1726-30. It described the scenery and country life of Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. Thomson was thus the first poet who led the English people into that new world of nature which has enchanted us in the work of modern poetry, but which was entirely impossible for Pope to understand. The impulse he gave was soon followed. Men left the town to visit the country and record their feelings. William Somerville's *Chase*, 1735, and John Dyer's *Grongar Hill*, 1726, a description of a journey in South Wales, and his *Fleece*, 1757, are full of country sights and scenes and even Akenside mingled his spurious philosophy with pictures of solitary natural scenery.

Foreign travel now enlarged the love of nature. Gray's letters, some of the best in the English language, describe natural scenery with a minuteness quite new in English Literature. In his poetry he used the description of nature as "its most graceful ornament," but never made it the subject. In the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, and in the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, natural scenery is interwoven with reflections on human life, and used to point its moral. Collins observes the same method in his *Ode on the Passions* and the *Ode to Evening*. There is as yet but little love of nature for its own sake. A further step was made by OLIVER GOLDSMITH in his *Traveller*, 1764, a sketch of national manners and governments, and in his *Deserted Village*, 1770, he describes natural scenery with less emotion than Collins, and does not moralise like Gray. The scenes he paints are pure pictures, and he has no personal interest in them. The next step was made by men like the two Wartons and by John Logan, 1782. Their poems do not speak of nature and human life, but of nature and themselves. They see the reflection of their own joys and sorrows in the woods and streams, and for the first time the pleasure of being alone with nature apart from men became a distinct element in modern poetry. In the latter poets it becomes one of

their main subjects. These were the steps towards that love of nature for its own sake which we shall find in the poets who followed Cowper.

During this time the interest in Mankind, that is, in Man independent of nation, class, and caste, which had already shown itself in prose, began to influence poetry. One form of it appeared in the interest the poets began to take in men of other nations than England; another form of it—and this was increased by the Methodist revival—was the interest in the lives of the poor. Thomson speaks with sympathy of the Siberian exile and the Mecca pilgrim, and the *Traveller* of Goldsmith enters into foreign interests. His *Deserted Village*, Shenstone's *Schoolmistress*, Gray's *Elegy* celebrate the annals of the poor.

These new elements and the changes are expressed by three poets—Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns. Cowper is the first of the poet who loves Nature entirely for her own sake. He paints only what he sees, but he paints it with the affection of a child for a flower and with the minute observation of a man. The idea of *Mankind as a whole* which has been growing up is fully formed in Cowper's mind. The range of his interests is as wide as the world, and all men form one brotherhood. All the social questions of education, Prisons, Hospitals, city and country life, the state of poor and their sorrows, the question of universal freedom and of slavery, of human wrong and oppression, of just and free government, of international intercourse and union, and above all the entirely new question of future destiny of the race as a whole, are introduced by Cowper into English poetry. It is a wonderful change; a change so wonderful that it is like a new world. And though splendour and passion were added by the poets who succeeded him to the new poetry, notably by Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley and Tennyson, yet they worked on the thoughts he had begun to express, and he is their forerunner.

Cowper's services to English poetry—His place in the history of English literature higher than that he holds in that literature itself.

As a poet, Cowper's intrinsic merits are of no mean order, though his claims rise far higher when we remember him as the head of the great revolution in English poetry which took place at the very close of the eighteenth century. During the greater part of the eighteenth century the poetry of Pope and his followers, or as it is called, the *artificial* school of poetry, was in high popularity. Certain set words and phrases, joined to an artificial smoothness of the lines, were regarded as the highest tests of poetic excellence, while nature was wholly lost sight of. Cowper himself bitterly complains :—

> "Manner is all in all, whate'er is writ,
> The substitute for genius, taste, and wit."

Gray, Goldsmith and Collins, each in his own way, had tried to resist this absurd system, but their work did not go very far. The real merit of making a successful stand against the false taste of the day, and of bringing men back from conventionalism to nature, belongs to Cowper alone.

The reform which Cowper set on foot, and which was completed by his immediate successors—Scott, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, &c.—was a two-fold one, *viz.* both in subject and in style. Contemporary vices, court- scandal, and other subjects of a fleeting interest, had occupied the genius of Pope : but Cowper drew his inspiration from nature and religion. There are no Damons, and Palemons and Musidoras, tricked up in English costumes, but aliens in thought and feelings, to be found in Cowper's poetry ; all his sketches, whether of nature or of human life, are genuinely English. Cowper's versification, too, differs widely from that of Pope. Pope's lines are smooth, polished but feeble. Cowper is plain—sometimes to ruggedness—but more natural and vigorous.

Q. What part did Cowper play in the Revival of Poetry that took place in England towards the close of the Eighteenth century?

A. Cowper's clear, simple, natural and almost colloquial style was an emphatic protest against the pompous diction of the Artificial school of Poetry of which Pope was the foremost exponent. Before Cowper's time, certain set words and phrases, joined to an artificial smoothness of the lines, were regarded as the highest test of poetic excellence. Natural feeling was lost in the pursuit of learned subtleties. Cowper himself complains :—

> "Manner is all in all, whatever is writ,
> The substitute for genius, taste, and wit."

But a great revolution in poetic taste was soon to take place—a revolution which began with the publication, in 1765, of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. Thomson, Gray, Goldsmith, Collins, and Crabbe, each in his own way, contributed to this great revival. But the chief merit of making a successful stand against the false taste of the day and bringing men back from conventionalism to nature belongs to Cowper alone.

Characteristic Features of Cowper's Poetry.

Excellences.

1. Among the peculiar features of Cowper's poetry, the first quality that strikes us is his *Truthfulness to Nature*. Everything that he sees around him he describes with a minute accuracy. He was an ardent lover of Nature from a very early age: as he himself says:

> "No bard could please me but whose lyre was tuned
> To Nature's praises." *Winter Evening*, Ll. 704, 5.

Though he does not go so deep as Wordsworth in his survey of nature, yet in him we see the dawning of that meditative spirit which was to receive its full development in the hands of Wordsworth and Shelley.

2. The next distinguishing feature of Cowper's style is its charming *Simplicity* and *Lucidity* or *Clearness*. His language is always plain and distinct, and perfectly free from affectation, mysticism, or ambiguity of any kind.

3. Another characteristic quality of Cowper is his *Geniality* or *Kindliness*. Though uniformly sad in his domestic life, yet there is no leaven of misanthrophy in his poems. He tells us of his little doings—his rambles by the Ouse, his fireside enjoyments, his tame hares, his gardening &c.—with as much good humour as if his life were a perpetual sunshine. He keenly lashes vice wherever it is found, but warmly loves all men.—Nor are his sympathies confined to man only: he has a tender sensibility for the little worm, and some of his happiest lines are those in which he pleads for the dumb creation.

4. *Originality* is also a very important characteristic of Cowper. He had an abhorrence of 'imitation, even of the best models,' and detested those who shone in borrowed feathers. But his diction and mode of verse betray, occasionally, an imitation—unconscious though it were—of those of his predecessors whom he admired most and had studied best, and pre-eminently among them, of Milton who

"—had indeed a poet's charms:
New to my taste his Paradise surpassed
The struggling efforts of my boyish tongue
To speak its excellence: I danced for joy."

Winter Evening, Ll. 709-12.

5. "Cowper is our highest master in simple pathos."

6. The last, and perhaps the most important, feature of Cowper's poetry, is its *Deep religious tone*. Everything that he writes, is more or less imbued with his religion.

Defects.

(1) Narrowness and bigotry—Cowper's religious tendency, while it has inspired some of his highest utterances, has also given a great deal of narrowness and bigotry to his poetry. It is almost painful to see the jealousy and alarm with which he regards the great scientific triumphs of the day. Indeed the unjust severity with which he treats art and sciences generally, not only betrays his profound ignorance in them, but to a certain extent mars the effect of his poetry.

(2) Want of creative imagination.

(3) His versification is occasionally rugged and harsh.

(4) His language occasionally suffers from his anxiety to be quite unartificial.

Q. Criticise Cowper's important poems.

A. "The longer and more important poems of Cowper are written in a peculiar and entirely original manner, and on a plan then entirely new in literature. They contain a union of reflection, satire, description, and moral declamation. His aim was to keep up a natural and colloquial style, and he is the declared enemy of all the pomp of diction which was at that time regarded as essential to poetry. His pictures of life and nature, whether of rural scenery or of in-door life have seldom been surpassed for truth and picturesqueness, and his satirical sketches of the follies and absurdities of manners, and his indignant denunciations of national offences against piety and morality, are equally remarkable, in the one case for sharpness and humour, and in the other, for a lofty grandeur of sentiment."—*Shaw.*

"In his poems as in his letters *truthfulness* is one great characteristic charm of Cowper. The service he did to English Literature by his thorough sincerity can scarcely be exaggerated. In an age of poetic conventionality, of shallow theories, of soulless practice, it was Cowper that inspired English poetry with a higher and nobler tone. As poets, Burns and Cowper worshipped

the same sovereign mistress—Truth. They would not prate of nature without knowing her; they would not pretend to passions of which they were unconscious. Lightness and grace may sometimes be wanting in Cowper's poetry, but the virtue of truthfulness is never wanting. Perhaps no writer is so absolutely free from affectation of every sort."—*Hales*.

Q. Criticise Cowper's treatment of Nature.

A. Cowper was a most ardent lover of Nature. Even when a boy, 'no bard could please him but whose lyre was turned to Nature's praises.' A careful observer of Nature and her ways, he describes everything that he sees around him with a minute accuracy—an intense realism—which forms one of the special charms of his poetry. But he does not go so deep as Wordsworth in his survey of Nature. He describes, indeed, her outward aspects with a loving fidelity, but he cannot see into the inner life of things. The wisdom and benevolence of God is the only spiritual lesson that Nature teaches him. At the same time, he is not like Thomson, content with merely describing her picturesque effects, but often strikes into a meditative strain and 'hears the herbs and flowers rejoicing all'; and no doubt, we find in him the dawning of that meditative spirit which was to receive its full development in the hands of Wordsworth and Shelley.

Q. Give the substance of Cowper's reflections on Man's instinctive love of nature.

Ans. The love of nature, says Cowper, is an inborn or instinctive tendency in man: 'it is born with all—an ingredient in the compound, man, infused at the creation of the kind.' Amidst, the wide and varied divergences of human nature, it is the one feeling common to all. It varies, indeed, in different people with the degree of mental culture; but all men are susceptible to it, more or less. For, it is so deeply implanted in human nature that even the various artificial attractions of city-life cannot stifle it. The suburban villas round London, and the rows of pots of plants and flowers that adorn the houses of the city-people, bear ample testimony to the fact.

Milton, Gray, Cowper and Wordsworth compared as Nature poets.

Milton had neither the eye nor the ear of the naturalist. At no time was he even an exact observer of nature. His references to nature, therefore, are not always accurate. In *L'Allegro*, he distinguishes the sweet-brier from the eglantine, whereas they are one and the same. He makes the sky-lark approach human habitations though larks "do not visit even poets' windows to say good-morrow, but rather "singing ever soar and soaring ever sing." Milton is essentially a man of books and sees nature with the eye of a scholar. He is not concerned to register the facts and phenomena of nature, but to convey the impressions they make on a sensitive soul. The external forms of things are presented to us as transformed through the heart and mind of the poet. His theme is *man*, and nature is introduced only as a background to the pictures of human life and as an excitant of fine emotions.

Gray describes natural scenery with a minuteness unknown to Milton, but, like Milton, uses the description of nature only as the most graceful ornament of his poetry. He is not a lover of nature for her own sake. The visible landscape,—the sea—the sky and all that men feel in contact with them have no attraction for him. He never makes nature his subject. Man is to him the highest object; nature is subordinate to man. In the "*Elegy written in the Country Church-yard*" and in the "*Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*" natural scenery is introduced with reflections on human life and used to point its moral.

Cowper is the first of the poets who love Nature entirely for her own sake. Even when a boy, 'no bard could please him but whose lyre was turned to Nature's praises.' A careful observer of Nature and her ways, he describes everything that he sees around him with a minute accuracy—an intense realism—which forms one of the special charms of his poetry. His description of nature excites *sensation* rather than *ideas*; for, he does not go so deep as Wordsworth in his survey of Nature. He describes, indeed, her outward aspects with a loving fidelity, but he cannot see into the inner life of things. He paints *only what he sees*. The wisdom and benevolence of God is the only spiritual lesson that Nature teaches him. At

the same time, he is not, like Thomson, content with merely describing her picturesque effects, but often strikes into a meditative strain and ' hears the herbs and flowers rejoicing all' ; and no doubt, we find in him the dawning of that meditative spirit which was to receive its full development in the hands of Wordsworth and Shelley.

Wordsworth's view of nature is entirely different from that which poets had held down to his time. Milton, Gray and other poets occasionally borrow from Nature, for purposes of embellishment or of moral teaching: but with Wordsworth Nature is the beginning, the middle, and the end of his poetry,—his "all in all." He is, in the words of Mr Ruskin, the keenest-eyed of all modern poets for what is deep and essential in nature. The most commonplace object of Nature is to him a source of highest inspiration. To quote his own words :—

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

He closes his little poem 'Nutting with an assurance that "*there is a spirit in the woods.*" Nature had, he thought, one living soul which, entering into flower, stream, or mountain, gave them each their own life. Between this spirit in Nature and the Mind of Man there was a pre-arranged harmony which enabled Nature to communicate its own thoughts to Man, and Man to reflect upon them, until an absolute union between them was established. This idea made him the first who loved Nature with a personal love, for she being living, and personal, and not only his reflection was made capable of being loved as a man loves a woman. He could brood on her character, her ways, her words, her life, as he did on those of his wife or sister. Hence arose his minute and loving observation of her and his passionate brooding on her ways and life, which constitutes the peculiar charm of his poetry.

Cowper's view of Nature differed from the views of other poets in that he preferred a " well-ordered nature ". Along with Tennyson, Cowper views Nature as in an artistically painted canvass ; Thomson sees Nature work ; Byron discerns the forces of Nature ; whereas Shelley and Wordsworth detect a soul in Nature ; with Wordsworth Nature *feels* ; with Cowper Nature discloses her beauties for the admiration of the spectator.

Q. "Cowper's poetry without Cowper would be the play of Hamlet with Hamlet's part left out." Explain this remark.

A. The remark points to the auto-biographical character of Cowper's poetry which forms one of its principal charms. His poetry is highly interesting as a faithful record of his feelings and experiences, his likes and dislikes, which are all introduced with an artless, unaffected grace that at once wins our sympathy. This auto-biographical interest, therefore, adds greatly to the charm of his poetry. Hence it is said that Cowper's poetry without these happy personal touches would be as uninteresting as the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet himself—the hero of the drama—left out.

Critical Remarks.

ON

The Task.

Date of composition.

The Sofa was begun in June or July 1783 and it was ended but not finished on the 3rd of August. Five more books followed; and the entire 'Task' was completed in August or September 1784. It was finally published in July 1785.

Origin—Title.

Southey says:—Lady Austen has the honour of having suggested to Cowper the subject of that work which made him the most popular poet of his age and raised him to a rank in English poetry from which no revolution of taste can detrude him. She had often urged him to try his powers in blank verse. At last he promised to comply with her request, if she would give him a subject. "Oh," she replied "you can never be in want of a subject; you can write upon any; write upon

this Sofa." The right chord was struck; the subject was accepted, and *The Sofa* became the title of the book. Later on other subjects were added, and *The Sofa* developed into *The Task*. Cowper very appropriately chose *Fit surculus arbor* (the twig becomes a tree) as the motto of the poem.

Cowper writes :—"The history of the ...... production is briefly this. A lady, fond of blank verse, demanded a poem of that kind from the author, and gave him the Sofa, for a subject. He obeyed, and, having much leisure, connected another subject with it; and pursuing the train of thought to which his situation and turn of mind led him, brought forth at length, instead of the trifle which he at first intended, a serious affair,—a volume."

Cowper's defence of the title.

In a letter to the Rev. John Newton, (letter 184) Cowper thus defends the title "As to the title, I take it to be the best that is to be had. It is not possible that a book, including such a variety of subjects, and in which no particular one is predominant, should find a title adapted to them all. in such a case it seemed almost necessary, to accommodate the name to the incident that gave birth to the poem; nor does it appear to me that because I performed more than my task, therefore the *Task* is not a suitable title. A house would still be a house though the builder of it should make it ten times as big as he at first intended. I might, indeed, following the example of the Sunday news-monger, call it the "Olio." But I should do myself wrong; for though it have much variety, it has, I trust, no confusion."

Plan.

Cowper writes :—"If the work cannot boast a regular plan the whole has one tendency—to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue."

Scope.

In the "Task", Cowper describes rural scenes, domestic happiness, fireside enjoyments, his lonely life in the country

his home, his friends, his thoughts as he walked the quiet landscape of Olney, the life of the poor people about him, mixed up with moral sentiments, and disquisitions on political and social subjects, and at the end, a prophecy of the victory of the Kingdom of God.

Purpose and moral.

On the purpose of the poem, in a letter to the Rev. John Newton, (letter 181) Cowper writes, "My principal purpose is to allure the reader by character, by scenery, by imagery, and such poetical embellishments, to the reading of what may profit him. Subordinately to this, to combat that predilection in favour of a metropolis that beggars and exhausts the country, by evacuating it of all its principal inhabitants; and collaterally, and as far as is consistent with this double intention, to have a stroke at vice, vanity, and folly, whenever I find them. I have not spared the universities."

Religion of the Task.

Burns says: "The religion of *The Task* is the religion of God and Nature; the religion that exalts and ennobles man."

Its Philosophy.

An innocent Epicurism, tempered by religious asceticism of a mild kind—such is the philosophy of *The Task*, and such the ideal embodied in the portrait of the happy man with which it concludes.

Its Metre.

"The Task" is written in blank verse or unrhymed iambic Pentametre, which consists of lines or verses containing ten syllables, the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth of which are accented, the odd syllables being unaccented. Such a line or verse is called an iambic pentameter, an *iambus* being a combination or *foot* of two syllables, the second of which is

stressed or accented, the first having no accent, and a pentameter (Greek *pente*, five, *metron*, measure) is a combination of five such feet. The chief charm of this metre is its extreme simplicity. Provided proper care be taken to avoid monotony, blank verse is capable of very great literary beauty.

Occasion.

The poem was so called as it was a *task* imposed on the poet by his fair friend, Lady Austen. Its composition was owing to the following curious incident:—Towards the year 1782, Lady Austen, a woman of cheerful, accomplished mind, visited the poet, and her lively and gay conversation tended much to raise his drooping spirits. Being very fond of blank verse, she often begged the poet to try his hand in that kind of composition. The poet demanding a subject, she playfully pointed to the sofa on which she was sitting, saying, "you can write upon this sofa." Hence the title of the poem, and hence the inadequacy of the title to its contents.

> "Once, when call'd
> To dress a sofa with the flow'rs of verse,
> I play'd awhile, obedient to the fair,
> With that light task."—*The Task, Book iv.* 1006 &c.

Lady Austen and Cowper.

One day in the summer of 1782 Mrs. Jones, the wife of a neighbouring clergyman, came into Olney to shop, and with her came her sister, Lady Austen, the widow of a Baronet, a woman of the world, who had lived much in France, gay, sparkling and vivacious, but at the same time full of feeling even to overflowing. The apparition acted like magic on Cowper. He desired Mrs Unwin to ask the two ladies to stay to tea, then shrank from joining the party which he had himself invited, ended by joining it, and, his shyness giving way with a rush, engaged in animated conversation with Lady Austen, and walked with her part of the way home. On her an equally

great effect appears to have been produced. A warm friendship at once sprang up, and before long Lady Austen had verses addressed to her as Sister Anne. Her ladyship, on her part, was smitten with a great love of retirement, and at the same time with great admiration for Mr. Scott, the curate of Olney, as a preacher, and she resolved to rent a house at Olney. That a woman of fashion, accustomed to French salons, should choose to live at Olney with a pair of Puritans for her only society, seems to show that one of the Puritans at least must have possessed great powers of attraction. Lady Austen's presence evidently wrought on Cowper like an elixir; "From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement," he writes to Mrs. Unwin, "we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Lady. Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's Chateau. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the evening wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I: and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both" It was perhaps while he was binding thread that Lady Austen told him the story of John Gilpin. He lay awake at night laughing over it, and next morning produced the ballad. It soon became famous. Lady Austen thus inspired *John Gilpin*. She inspired, it seems, the lines on the loss of the Royal George. She did more: she invited Cowper to try his hand at something considerable in blank verse. When he asked for a subject, she bade him take the sofa on which she was reclining, and which, sofas being then uncommon, was a more striking and suggestive object than it would be now. The right chord was struck; the subject was accepted; and *The Sofa* grew into *The Task*; the title of the song reminding us that it was "commanded by the fair."

Before the publication of 'The Task,' a rupture took place, between her and the Olney couple. The cause of this severance has been much debated. The account which Cowper gave of it to Unwin is not precise. 'We found the connexion,' he writes, 'on some accounts an inconvenient one. The dissimilitude was too great not to be felt continually, and consequently made our intercourse unpleasant.' To Lady Hesketh the Poet complained that he found his leisure for study or composition sadly interrupted by his constant attendance on Lady Austen; which, though at first optional, 'long

usage had made a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity.' In short, he 'was forced to neglect the 'Task,' to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject.' Cowper had written of Lady Austen to Unwin, July 29, 1781, 'She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with your mother and me.' The most recent disclosures all tend to the suggestion that these words were true (as far as he was himself concerned) in a far more literal sense than the writer intended. Lady Austen showed Hayley some verses which Cowper had addressed to her, and which seemed to convey a proof to her—all too eager for such proof—that he was really attached to her personally These verses—'To a Lady who wore a lock of his hair set with diamonds'—were first printed by Mr. Benham, in 1870. In them the Poet sang—

> 'The heart that beats beneath that breast
> Is William's, well I know;
> A nobler prize and richer far
> Than India could bestow.'

The woman who reads these lines will surely pardon Lady Austen's misconception of their import. Unhappily, this cheerful intimacy was abruptly ended in 1784. It would seem that there arose some jealousy between Lady Austen and Mrs. Unwin and Cowper, having to choose between her old friend and the new; did his duty firmly, with whatever sorrow. He felt himself to be bound to Mrs. Unwin by so many and such ties of gratitude and affection that when it became a question whether he should give up her, or Lady Austen, there was but one answer he could give her. He therefore wrote to the latter that 'very tender and resolute letter' on which he explained and lamented the circumstance that forced him to renounce her Society' and, which Lady Austen. "in a moment of natural mortification" destroyed. It was in May 1784, that she took her final leave of Olney. She was afterwards married to M. de Tardiff, a scholar and a poet; and died in Paris, August, 12, 1808.

Critical Analysis of "the Task".

As *Paradise Lost* is to militant Puritanism, so is *The Task* to the religious movement of its author's time. To its character as the poem of a sect it no doubt owed

and still owes much of its popularity. Not only did it give beautiful and effective expression to the sentiments of a large religious party, but it was about the only poetry that a strict Methodist or Evangelical could read; while to those whose worship was unritualistic and who were debarred by their principles from the theatre and the concert, anything in the way of art that was not illicit must have been eminently welcome.

It rambles through a vast variety of subjects, religious, political, social, philosophical, and horticultural, with a little of method. Nor are the reflections, as a rule, naturally suggested by the preceding passage. From the use of a sofa by the gouty to those, who being free from gout, do not need sofa.—and so to country walks and country life is hardly a natural transition. It is hardly a natural transition from the ice palace built by a Russion despot, to despotism and politics in general. But if Cowper deceives himself in fancying that there is a plan or a close connexion of parts, he is right as to the existence of a pervading tendency The praise of retirement and of country life as most friendly to piety and virtue, is the perpetual refrain of *The Task*, if not its definite theme. From this idea immediately flow the best and the most popular passages those which please apart from anything peculiar to a religious school; those which keep the poem alive; those which have found their way into the heart of the nation, and intensified the taste for rural and domestic happiness, to which they most winningly appeal. In these Cowper pours out his inmost feelings, with the liveliness of exhilaration, by contrast with previous misery. The pleasures of the country and of home, the walk, the garden, and above all the "intimate delights" of the winter evening, the snug parlour with its close-drawn curtains shutting out the stormy night, the steaming and bubbling tea-urn, the cheerful circles, the book read aloud, the newspaper through which we look out into the unquiet world, are painted by the writer with a heartfelt enjoyment, which infects the reader.

The writer of 'The Task' also deserves the crown which he has himself claimed as a close observer and truthful painter of nature.

Now and then, however, in reading *The Task*, we come across a dash of warlike patriotism which, amidst the general philanthropy, surprises and offends the reader's palate.

In *The Task*, there are sweeping denunciations of amusements which we now justly deem innocent, and without which or something equivalent to them, the wrinkles on the brow of care could not be smoothed nor life preserved from dullness and moroseness. There is fanaticism in this no doubt; but in justice to the Methoddist as well as to the Puritan, let it be remembered that the stage, card parties, and even dancing once had in them something from which even the most liberal morality might recoil

In his writings generally, but especially in *The Task*, Cowper, besides being an apostle of virtuous retirement aad evangelical piety, is, by his general tone, an apostle of sensibility. *The Task* is a perpetual protest not only against the fashionable vices and the irreligion, but against the hardness of the world; and in a world which worshipped Chesterfield the protest was not needless, nor was it ineffective. Among the most tangible characteristics of this special sensibility is the tendency of its brimming love of humankind to overflow upon animals; and of this there are marked instances in some passages of *The Task*.

> I would not enter on my list of friends
> (Though graced with polished manners and fine sense,
> Yet wanting sensibility) the man
> Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.

The Task contains such sweet touches of domestic life, such exquisite delineations of nature, such a tender sensibility, that perhaps there is no poem in the English language read with a more heartfelt delight. It is also

interesting as a faithful representation of the actual circumstances and feelings of the writer. This auto-biographical interest—his *subjectivity* as it has been called—lends a peculiar charm to Cowper's poetry. He takes his readers at once into his confidence, and tells them all that he does, thinks, and feels. 'The Task indeed is in a great part made up of his own doings and experiences; and from the materials to be found in this one poem it would not be difficult to build up an instructive sketch of the author's life and character.'

Among the defects of *The Task*, it may be mentioned that it does not display any high degree of imagination and that its versification is rugged, occasionally harsh.

Q. (a) How was "The Task" received by the public? (b) What was the poet's object in writing it?

A. (*a*) *The Task* met with a very cordial reception from the public. Its success was immediate Its charming descriptions of rural life and scenes, its satirical sketches of the follies and vices of the age, its indignant denunciations of national offences against piety and morality were read and admired by all classes of readers. *The Task* is undoubtedly the greatest of Cowper's poems, and no wonder, it became immensely popular. It soon acquired an American celebrity; and an edition was brought out in New York.

(*b*). Cowper's object was, as he himself says, 'to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London-life, to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue', and collaterally, 'to have a stroke at vice, vanity, and folly' wherever he found them.

Q. Account for the immense popularity of the Task.

A. *The Task* appeared just at the time when the popular taste demanded a poem of its kind. A reaction against the artificial poetry of Pope and Dryden had

already set in. Thomson, Warton and Percy had revived a taste for descriptive poetry. The English reading public was; therefore, prepared for it, and hailed it with delight, on account of its manifold enduring charms.

Another reason for its immediate success, according to Goldwin Smith, lay in the fact that it was the poem of a sect.. "Not only did it give beautiful and effective expression to the sentiments of a large, religious party but it was about the only poetry that a strict Methodist or Evangelical could read."

Q. (*a*) What was Cowper's own estimate of "The Task"? (*b*) How far may this estimate be considered correct?

A. In a letter to the Rev. William Unwin, Cowper thus speaks of his *Task* :—"In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical. What there is of a religious cast in the volume, I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons—first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance—and, secondly, that my best impressions might be last......My descriptions are all from nature. Not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my experience. Not one of them borrowed from books or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers which I have varied as much as I could (for blank verse without variety of members is no better than bladder and string) I have imitated nobody, though sometimes, perhaps, there may be an apparent resemblance; because, at the same time, I would not imitate, I have not effectually differed. If the work cannot boast a regular plan (in which respect, however, I do not think it altogether indefensible) it may yet boast that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency—to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue."

(*b*) The above estimate is correct except in two points: (1) Cowper says, he has imitated no one. 'But he manifestly imitated the softer passages of Milton. To produce melody and variety, he, like Milton, avails himself fully of all the resources of a composite language.' (2) He also says that 'the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage.' But this is hardly true. From the use of a sofa by the gouty to those, who, being free from gout, do not need sofas—and so to country-walks and country-life is hardly a natural transition. It is hardly a natural transition from the ice-palace built by a Russian despot, to despotism and politics in general. But if Cowper deceives himself in fancying that there is a plan or a close connection of parts, he is right as to the existence of a pervading tendency. The praise of retirement and of a country-life as most friendly to piety and virtue is the perpetual refrain of *the Task*, if not its definite theme.

Q. Mention some of the special charms of The Task.

A. Its charms are (1) *Its exquisite delineations of country-life.* The pictures of domestic life and rural scenery which Cowper has drawn in *the Task* have seldom been surpassed for truth and picturesqueness. 'The district in which he lived is one of the least romantic in England, yet nothing more victoriously proves that true poetical genius can give a charm and an interest to the most unpromising subjects, than the fact, that Cowper has communicated to the level banks of the Ouse a magic that will never pass away. Similarly, the quiet home circle of English life, the tea-table, the newspaper

and the hearth, have derived from him a beauty and a dignity which other people have failed to communicate to the proudest scenes of camps and courts.'

(2) *Its fidelity to nature.* As Cowper himself says, '*his descriptions are all from nature, not one of them second-handed*'. This fascinating realism in his delineations of nature forms one of the principal charms of *The Task*. 'As a poet he worshipped one sovereign mistress—Truth. He would not prate of nature without knowing her; he would not pretend to passions of which he was unconscious; he would not take any part in the tricked-out masquerades of his day.'

(3) *Its homely grace consisting in simplicity and clearness of expression.* The sentiments are as pure as the language is free from affectation, ambiguity or mysticism of any kind. Cowper did not write to make a name for himself. He aimed at doing good to his fellow-men, and said what he had to say in the plainest manner possible.

(4) *Its purity of tone.* A healthy moral tone pervades the whole poem. The sentiments are always pure, piety and virtue being throughout insisted upon. In an age of poetic conventionality, or shallow theories, of soulless practice, it was Cowper that inspired English poetry with a higher and nobler tone. 'The praise of country-life and retirement as most friendly to piety and virtue is the perpetual refrain of *The Task*, if not its definite theme.'

(5) *Its subjectivity or auto-biographical interest.* *The Task* is full of the poet himself, and mirrors the

whole man. It is, therefore, highly interesting as a faithful representation of the actual circumstances, feelings, and experiences of the writer. He takes us at once into his confidence and tells us of his little doings—his rambles by the Ouse, his tame hares, his gardening, the intimate delights of his winter evenings by the snug fireside—in such a simple, natural way that we are at once led to sympathise with him, instead of considering him intrusive or egotistical. 'Nothing can exceed the ease, the simplicity, the genuine courtesy, the kindly garrulity with which he converses with all who are willing to walk by his side; and helps them to draw, from the scenes he loves, the pleasures which they impart to himself, and to share with him the emotions and reflections which they stir up in his own mind.'

(6) *Its geniality or kindliness of tone.* Though Cowper was uniformly sad in his domestic life, yet there is no leaven of misanthropy in his poems. He keenly lashes vice wherever it is found, but warmly loves all men. Even the sufferings of the far-off Indian people found a place in his sympathetic heart; through the loopholes of his retreat at Olney, he keenly watched the progress of events in India and severely condemned the cruel oppressions of the E. I. Company. Nor are his sympathies confined to man only; he has a tender sensibility for the little worm, and some of his happiest lines are those in which he pleads for the dumb creation.

(7) *Originality.*

(8) *Masculine and idiomatic strength of language.*

(9) *Vein of humour.*

Q. Point out the chief defects of the Task.

A. (1). *Its want of method.* "The Task" has no unity or regularity of plan. In fact, the way in which it originated, precluded all possibility of it. Cowper began in a mock-heroic strain 'to dress a sofa with the flowers of verse' and 'played a while obedient to the fair, with that light task.' But the 'light task' soon grew into a pretty serious one, and he strayed into an endless variety of topics and produced a big volume in six books. It must be remembered, however, that this want of design or method gave the poet considerable liberty of choice, so that, he has freely indulged in his most congenial subjects.

(2) *Its narrowness and bigotry in some points.* Cowper's religious tendency often degenerates into a morbid fanaticism, making him rail against the triumphs of modern art and science with an unjust severity which betrays his profound ignorance in them. It would be hard to find a more foolish and mischievous piece of rant than that contained in the Garden, lines 150-190. Carried away by his love of rural innocence he indiscriminately abuses pursuits as innocent as those in which he delighted (Winter Evening, ll. 195-210) and regards corporate bodies generally as unnatural combinations out of which no good could come. (Winter Evening, ll. 659-690).

(3) *Its versification is rugged, occasionally harsh.*

(4) *Want of creative imagination.*

(5) *Too much austerity of satire.*

(6) *Want of lightness and grace.*

But these defects weigh but as dust in the balance against its various merits, and it is on *The Task* that Cowper's fame rests. As Lamb says, 'I could forgive a man for not enjoying Milton; but I would not call that man my friend who should be offended with the divine chit-chat of Cowper.''

Q. (a) Characterise Cowper's satire. (b) Why is it introduced ?

A. *(a)* There is a great deal of satire in "The Task". The vices and follies of the age are keenly lashed. But Cowper's satire is not of the venomous and personal kind like that of Pope and his school. Cowper, like Horace, is bold but polished and graceful in his satire. But he is often deficient in the knowledge of his subject, and is, therefore, too severe on amusements which we now justly deem innocent.

(*b*) Cowper himself says on the point: "In some passages you will observe me very satirical. Writing on such subjects I could not be otherwise. I can write nothing without aiming, at best, at usefulness: it were beneath my years to do it, and still more dishonourable to my religion. I know that a reformation of such abuses as I have censured, is not to be expected from the efforts of a poet; but to contemplate the world, its follies, its vices, its indifference to duty, and its strenuous attachment to what is evil, and not to reprehend, were to approve it. From this charge at least I shall be clear."

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16. What do you learn of Cowper's own life from the Task?

Ans. We learn how happily he spent his days in his quiet retreat at Olney with his lady friends, Mrs. Unwin and Lady Austen. He led a simple innocent country-life which he so much loved, and spent his time in reading newspapers, poetry or history, in music, social converse, and such other harmless amusements. He was perfectly contented with the 'low vale of life' in which it had pleased God to place him, and heartily enjoyed the 'intimate delights, fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness and all the comforts that the lowly roof of undisturbed retirement could afford.

Style and Diction.

'Cowper always treats of simple subjects, and always in simple, clear, pellucid language. He says himself in a letter to Mrs. Unwin: "Every one, conversant with verse-writing, knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is, of all styles, the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose without being prosaic, to marshal the words in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extempore speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can

undertake." This is an admirable description of his own style. In one point only he falls short of the standard he set himself—his fondness for Latin derivatives. He was never proof against the temptation of using high-sounding Latin polysyllable. He coins new words from the Latin, he uses old words in their primitive Latin sense; *e.g.* verses like, "The stable yields a stercoraceous heat," are not uncommon. In defence of Cowper's Latinised style, a critic says: "Did not Cowper's grandiloquent words arise in part at least, from his playfulness and sense of humour? He often seems to me to be laughing at himself like Lamb, as he coins them." Perhaps no writer is, so absolutely free from affectation of every sort. Indeed Cowper's language occasionally suffers from his anxiety to be quite unartificial.

COWPER'S TASK.

BOOK I.



The SOFA.



COWPER'S TASK.

Book I.

THE SOFA.

Argument.

Historical deduction of seats, from the stool to the Sofa—A schoolboy's ramble—A walk in the country—The scene described—Rural sounds as well as sights delightful—Another walk—Mistake concerning the charms of solitude corrected—Colonnades commended—Alcove, and the view from it—The Wilderness—The Grove—The thresher—The necessity and the benefits of exercise—The works of nature superior to, and in some instances inimitable by, art—The wearisomeness of what is commonly called a life of pleasure—Change of scene sometimes expedient—A common described, and the character of crazy Kate introduced—Gipsies—The blessings of civilised life—That state most favourable to virtue—The South Sea Islanders compassionated, but chiefly Omai—His present state of mind supposed—Civilised life friendly to virtue, but not great cities—Great cities, and London in particular, allowed their due praise, but censured—*Fête champêtre*—The book concludes with a reflection on the effects of dissipation and effeminacy upon our public measures.

THE SOFA.

I sing the Sofa. (I who lately sang
Truth, Hope, and Charity, and touched with awe
The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand,
Escaped with pain from that adventurous flight.)
Now seek repose upon an humbler theme ; 5
The theme though humble, yet august and proud
The occasion—for the Fair commands the song.

Time was, when clothing sumptuous or for use,
Save their own painted skins, our sires had none.
As yet black breeches were not ; satin smooth, 10

NOTES

ON THE

SOFA.

1-7. *ANALYSIS* :—An apology for the title 'Sofa.'

1-7. **PARAPHRASE** :—I who only recently dealt with such sublime topics as Truth, Hope and Charity in verse in a spirit of reverence, and was fain to withdraw from that enterprise my hands that shook with fear—now turn to a much simpler subject by way of recreation,—and though the subject is homely, the circumstance leading me to write upon it lends to it a certain majesty and dignity of which I am proud—for a lady bids me write.

1. **I sing the Sofa**—the Sofa is the theme of my poem. Mark how the poet rushes at once into the *medias res*, without any preface of any kind. The introduction is modelled after that of 'Æneid' and 'Paradise Lost.'

Cf.:—"*Arms* and the *man I sing*."—DRYDEN, *Æneid*.

Poetry and music were originally allied. The Poet or Bard sang his verse to the music of the lyre. Hence the poetical use of the verb *to sing*. Cf.:—

"Sing heavenly Muse.. I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song."
—*Paradise Lost*, I. 13.

Sing (Sax. *singan*) to the voice or to melody; here, to celebrate in verse; used transitively.

Sofa—a long-seat with stuffed bottom, back and arms. The word is of Arabic origin (Arabic *Saffa*, to set in order). It seems to have come into English through French in the 17th century. We have several other words from Arabic, *e.g.*, algebra, alchemy, lute, (alud), alcohol, bazar, cotton, zero, and many others.

1-2. **I who lately...Charity**—referring to the three Poems on these religious themes which Cowper wrote in 1780.

Truth &c.—Poem begun December 1780, at the same time as *Table Talk* and *Expostulation*; finished following March. *Hope* and *Charity* written between them and the middle of July. All three religious poems treating of man's fall, and the need of a Saviour, interspersed with satire on the world and its ways, rarely personal.—STORR. These three poems were published in 1782, and they formed Cowper's first published volume.

2-3. **Touched ..chords**—smote on the awe-inspiring strings of the lyre, as it were, with fear and reverence; dealt with these lofty themes in a reverential spirit; endeavoured with an awful sense of the responsibility of such an attempt to write on these solemn subjects.

3. **The solemn chords** *i.e.* the sacred themes of Truth, Hope and Charity. This is an instance of Transferred Epithet—as *solemn* grammatically belongs to *chords*, but it is transferred so as to be the epithet belonging to the person who strikes the chord.

With...hand—the hand that trembles with emotion owing to the soul-stirring nature of the subjects dealt with.

4. **Escaped...flight**—having with difficulty completed this arduous task.

With pain—because he was painfully conscious of his inability to do full justice to such lofty themes.

Adventurous flight—high and bold enterprise; extremely bold and difficult task of writing on such themes involving lofty flights of imagination. This line is Miltonic. Cf. Paradise Lost I. 13.
"Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song."

'Escaped with pain'—Possibly in allusion to the reception these poems at first met with.

6. **August and proud the occasion**—The circumstance that led to its composition has a certain majesty and dignity about it, inasmuch as a lady demanded it.

7. **The occasion**—my motive for writing.

The Fair—one of the fair sex, a lady. The use of the word in the singular number is uncommon. Cf. 'the fair' in line 73, 'the sick' in line 89, and 'the paralytic' in line 472.
The lady here referred to was Lady Austen, the same lady who had told Cowper the story of John Gilpin. She now desired him to try blank verse, and playfully gave him the Sofa for a subject: hence he called the whole poem *The Task*

8-88. *ANALYSIS*:—The history of the sofa. In the earliest times the Britons had no seats. The English, in the reign of Alfred, first invented the three legged stool. The next stage was the cushioned four legged one, which developed into the armless chair with upright back, to which arms were added by some clergymen. This was followed by *settees* which at last grew into the *sofa*.

These lines have been censured as "pure burlesque which accords ill with the tone of the rest of the poem." But any such dry historic or rather antiquarian disquisition about the origin of an article of furniture must needs be rather dull and prosaic.

8-9. **PARAPHRASE**:—There was a time, says the poet, when our ancestors wore no clothes whatever for use or ornament, except the painting on their bodies—if that could be called clothing at all.

8. **Sumptuous**—Lit. bought at a high price; Lat. *sub*, up, and *emo*, to buy; costly, magnificent. (forms a contrast to 'for use').

Sumptuous or for use—for ostentation or use.

9. **Save...skins**—referring to the ancient Britons whom Cæsar found in the island, who *tattooed* or stained their *faces* and *limbs* with the paint *woad*, which produced a blue colour; and for this reason they were the more terrible to look at in battle. But they clothed their *bodies* with the skins of animals.

Painted—Stained with woad.

Sires—through Fr. from Lat. *senior*, elder. Is it historically correct to say that the Celts or ancient Britons were the sires or ancestors of the English people? Cowper forgets that the Britons were driven to Wales by the Saxons, the ancestors of the English race. He, however, means the Britons, the aborigines.

None—is here an adjective qualifying 'clothing,' *No*, which we always use as the adjective, leaving *none* as the noun, or to be used absolutely' is just a shortened form of *none*. Distinguish the adverb *no* A. S. *na* = (*ne*, not, and á. ever).

As yet—up to the time we are speaking of.

10. **Breeches were not**—Trousers did not come into use.

Breeches—Garments covering the thighs or knees but not coming to the feet like trousers.

Satin smooth—Soft like satin.

Or velvet soft, or plush with shaggy pile:
The hardy chief upon the rugged rock,
Washed by the sea, or on the gravelly bank
Thrown up by wintry torrents roaring loud,
Fearless of wrong, reposed his weary strength. 15
Those barbarous ages past, succeeded next

11. **Plush**—a kind of woollen cloth having its *pile* or *hairy surface* uncropped, formerly worn by gentlemen, now confined to foot-men.

Shaggy pile—The hairy, rugged surface—'*Plush with shaggy pile*' is tautology, as 'plush' is a cloth with the pile or hairy surface uncropped—'Satin smooth,' 'velvet soft' and 'plush' are each nom to 'was not' understood.

12-15. **PARAPHRASE:**—The brave and resolute heads of the savage clans of those ancient days had no better seats to rest their weary and powerful limbs upon than those afforded by nature—either the rough rocks bathed by the sea or the embankments of gravels formed by the deposits of the roaring currents of water in winter. Briefly, the sturdy chieftain, fearing no evil rested his fatigued limbs on the rough sea-beaten rocks, or on the pebbly banks raised by the boisterous and swollen streams of winter.

13. **Grav'ly** = gravelly *i.e.* full of gravel or small stones mixed with sand deposited by the receding currents of water.

Bank—rising mound or ground in a river or sea formed by alluvial deposits.

14. **Thrown up**—cast up.

15. **Fearless of wrong**—quite safe from harm or injury.

Wrong—used in its objective sense, injury; injury at the hand of an enemy—referring to 'chief' in l. 12.

Weary strength—his strong limbs, when tired.

16. **Those...past**—Those savage times being over; an absolute clause.

Succeeded...invention—with the progress of civilisation, a time of new invention followed.

The birthday of Invention; weak at first,
Dull in design, and clumsy to perform.
Joint-stools were then created; on three legs
Upborne they stood—three legs upholding firm 20

17. **Birthday of Invention**—the dawn of discovery.

Weak—"Weak," "dull" and "clumsy" qualify invention.

Weak at first—As a child which comes out just from its mother's womb, is very weak, so was an invention first made very weak.

18. **Dull**—Slow in planning or inventing.

Dull in design—*i.e.* the plans were rude in the conception.

Clumsy to perform—ill-made, awkward in the matter of practical usefulness; served their purpose very awkwardly. The things made were ill-shaped.

To perform—*i.e.* for performing or accomplishing; in execution.

19-20. **PARAPHRASE:**—Then the joint-stool was invented. It consisted of a heavy block of wood, round or square supported by three legs. The memorable Alfred sat on such a stool, while he governed his young kingdom: and stools of this kind may yet be found in old halls, and in gloomy manorial dwellings, though the firm oak of which they are made, has been bored through and through by the all-devouring worms.

19. **Joint-stools**—Stools made by a nice joining of parts,—flat piece of wood with three legs joined together.

20. **Up-borne**—supported

Three legs—nom. abs.

A massy slab, in fashion square or round.
On such a stool immortal Alfred sat,
And swayed the sceptre of his infant realms:
And such in ancient halls and mansions drear
May still be seen; but perforated sore 25
And drilled in holes, the solid oak is found,

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21. **Massy**—Bulky, weighty. *Massive* is more common; though *massy* is not usual in poetry. Cf. Milton's 'Il Penseroso,' line 158 "With antique pillars *massy* proof".

Slab—a flat piece of wood or stone.

Fashion—shape

22. **Alfred**, Alfred the Great, king of England from 872 to 901.

Immortal—because of his *undying* fame.

23. **Swayed...realms**—held the rod of his newly-constituted kingdom—ruled over his kingdom in its earliest stages.

Infant realms—Kingdom whose power was yet undeveloped; newly-constituted kingdom.

24. **Drear**—dismal, lonely.

25-28. **Perforated...through** -Having been bored from end to end by the all-devouring worms.

25. **Sore**—Sorely, utterly; much.

26. **Drill'd in holes**—means much the same thing as 'perforated sore'—bored and hence full of holes, having been eaten away by worms.

By worms voracious eating through and through.

At length a generation more refined
Improved the simple plan; made three legs four,
Gave them a twisted form vermicular, 30
And o'er the seat, with plenteous wadding stuffed,
Induced a splendid cover, green and blue,

28-29. **A generation...four**, a more civilised and polished generation developed the rude device into a four legged one.

30. **Gave...vermicular**—put them (the legs) into a spiral, worm-like shape. The legs were originally plain and simple but with the progress of refinement in tastes, they were made more ornamental and shaped like a spiral.

A twisted form vermicular—a winding worm-like spiral shape. The order of the words is Miltonic. Cf. Milton: '*Unreproved pleasures free*' (L'Allegro, 40), '*Native wood-notes wild*' (L'Allegro 134). Also Gray, who follows Milton more closely in his diction than any other poet of his age: '*the purest ray serene*' (Elegy l. 53).

Vermicular—pertaining to or like a *worm* in motion—spiral, zigzag; (L. *vermiculus*, a little worm, dim. of *vermis*, worm.) An instance of Cowper's occasional fondness for long Latin words.

31. **Plenteous...stuffed**—filled with a mass of soft loose matter, such as tow, carded cotton, &c.

Wadding—A mass of soft loose matter thrust close together for stuffing beds, seats, or garments.

Induced—over-spread, drew on or over so as to cover; a *Latinism*.

32. **A Splendid cover...sublime**—The constr. *is*: A more refined generation spread over the seat, filled with a mass of soft loose matter, a rich many-coloured cover of tapestry or carpet woven closely and of good workmanship, or some other kind of grand embroidery-work.

Yellow and red, of tapestry richly wrought,
And woven close, or needlework sublime.
There might ye see the peony spread wide, 35
The full-blown rose, the shepherd and his lass,
Lapdog and lambkin with black staring eyes,
And parrots with twin cherries in their beak.

Now came the cane from India, smooth and bright
With Nature's varnish; severed into stripes. 40

33. **Wrought**—decorated

34. **Sublime** = (grand, lofty) is here used ironically, or it may mean, raised above the surface of the canvas.

Q. Justify the epithet sublime.

35. **There** (*i.e.*)—In the tapestry or embroidery spread on the cushioned seat of the four-legged stool.

Peony—a plant with beautiful crimson flowers—it was woven into the tapestry.

36. **Shepherd and his lass**—These figures were worked into the tapestry.

37. **Lap-dog**—a small dog carried as a pet by ladies.

Lambkin—Little lamb.

Kin is a diminutive suffix; Cf. *manikin.*

Staring—Expressionless.

38. **Twin cherries**, a pair of cherries.

Cherry is a kind of small fruit (L. *cerasus.*) so called from the town of Cerasus in Asia Minor whence they were imported into Italy.

39. **Now**—Now at this period, next in order.

39-40. **Smooth...varnish**—naturally smooth and glossy.

40-41. **Severed...other**—cut into slender pieces inserted into one another.

That interlaced each other, these supplied
Of texture firm a lattice-work, that braced
The new machine, and it became a chair.
But restless was the chair; the back erect
Distressed the weary loins, that felt no ease: 45
The slippery seat betrayed the sliding part

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42. **Lattice-work**, cross pieces, originally of wood, connected with lath, a flat thin piece of wood. The word 'lattice' was afterwards applied to other materials, so crossed.

41-44. **PARAPHRASE:**—These formed a solid net-work of cross bars that strengthened the new contrivance which became known as the chair.

41. **Interlaced**—were *laced* or inserted into each other.

42. **Texture**—stuff, composition. The way in which a thing is woven or put together.

Braced—strengthened.

44. **Restless**—uncomfortable, giving no rest or comfort,—a peculiar use of the word. The more usual sense is, feeling uneasy. Here used with an active meaning as 'affording no rest.'

44-45. **The back...ease**—The back being quite upright or perpendicular, was very troublesome to the lower part of the body which was ill at ease.

46. **Betrayed**—deceived, because it did not afford the secure seat which it seemed to promise, inasmuch as the body was apt to slide off from the slippery surface.

That pressed it, and the feet hung dangling down,
Anxious in vain to find the distant floor.
These for the rich : the rest whom fate had placed
In modest mediocrity, content 50
With base materials, sat on well-tanned hides,
Obdurate and unyielding, glassy smooth,
With here and there a tuft of crimson yarn,
Or scarlet crewel, in the cushion fixed,

49. **These**—'were' understood.

50. **Whom...mediocrity**—who belonged to the humbler middle classes.

Modest mediocrity—the middle state or condition of life.

51. **Well-tanned**—nice and soft ; well-cured ; made into leather by being steeped in vegetable solutions.

52. **Obdurate and Unyielding**—very hard and tough.

Obdurate—Tough, hard. Usually accented on the last syllable, but here on the second, as in Milton's P. L. 1·58. "Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate."

Unyielding &c.—to pressure.

Glassy smooth—as smooth as glass.

53. **Crimson**—Of a deep red colour, tinged with blue; *scarlet* is a bright red colour tinged with yellow.

54. **Yarn**—Thread of any material.

Crewel—a kind of worsted yarn slackly twisted.

Fine worsted, chiefly used for working and embroidery. The crewel was twisted up into knots or tufts on the seats of chairs.

If cushion might be called, what harder seemed 55
Than the firm oak of which the frame was formed.
No want of timber then was felt or feared
In Albion's happy isle. The lumber stood
Ponderous and fixed by its own massy weight.
But elbows still were wanting; these, some say, 60
An alderman of Cripplegate contrived;
And some ascribe the invention to a priest,

55-56. **If cushion &c.**—The construction is, 'If what seemed harder than the firm oak, of which the frame was formed, might be called a cushion.' A parody of Milton. P. L., 2nd Book, l. 664.

"The other shape,
If shape it might be called which shape had none."

A cushion is soft, and therefore, the poet doubts whether he is justified in calling this tough material a cushion, for, he says, the cushion or covering was as hard as the frame-work of the chair.

57-58. **The sense is:**—In those days no want of timber was felt in England—(*i.e.*) there was plenty of wood to be found in England.

57. **Fear'd**—Before the universal use of coal as fuel, a great deal of timber was burnt in England; and some people, when Cowper wrote, believed that the forests of England would soon be exhausted.

58. **Albion's happy &c.**—"Albion" is an old poetic name of England: so named from the ancient inhabitants called Albiones. The usual etymology *albus* (white), said to have been given by Julius Cæsar in allusion to the "white cliffs," is quite untenable, as an old Greek treatise, the *De Mundo*, formerly ascribed to Aristotle, mentions the islands of Albion and Ierne three hundred years before the invasion of Cæsar. Probably "Albion" or Albany was the Celtic name of all Great Britain, subsequently restricted to Scotland, and then to the Highlands of Scotland. Certainly

the inhabitants of the whole island are implied in the word *Albionēs* in Festus Avienus's account of the voyage of Hamilcar in the fifth century B.C, Albion or England is here called happy (*i.e.*) fortunate, with special reference to the abundance of timber.

Lumber—refers to the 'chair' which as yet was a clumsy, heavy thing. Trench says: The Lombards were the bankers and pawn-brokers of Europe in the middle ages and the place where they lived in London, is still called the Lombard Street, the street of bankers. 'To lumber' is old English to pawn. Hence 'lumber room' was the room where pawned articles were stored; and any piece of furniture stowed away, as out of date and clumsy, was called *lumber*.

Stood—continued to stand.

59. **Ponderous**—heavy.

60. **Elbows**—of the chairs.

61. **Alderman**—a city magistrate next in rank to a mayor; in early English, it included nearly all of the highest rank.

Cripplegate—A district of London named after one of the old Citygates which was so called on account of the *cripples* who sought charity there. In olden days, London, like all great cities of the world, was surrounded by a high wall. Remains of the old wall of London may still be seen in the churchyard of St. Giles', Cripplegate. Cripplegate was the gate in the wall between Aldersgate and Newgate.

62. **Priest**—Here the poet indirectly hits at the ease-loving clergy. It is jocularly implied that the stout, fat priest was led by his love of ease to think of improving the chair by suiting arms to it. Cf. line 87. The poor priest has in all countries been more or less an object of ridicule. Cf. The old saying, "there never was a mischief but a woman or a priest at the bottom of it."

Burly and big, and studious of his ease.
But, rude at first, and not with easy slope,
Receding wide, they pressed against the ribs, 65
And bruised the side; and, elevated high,
Taught the raised shoulders to invade the ears.
Long time elapsed or ere our rugged sires

63. **Burly and big**—Fat and stout; both the words convey the same idea. Notice the fondness, not of poetry only, but of all languages, for alliterative repetitions: *e.g.*, 'safe and sound' 'spick and span' 'kith and kin'...Often one half of the word or phrase is meaningless: as in. pell-mell; helter-skelter; hurly-burly, hugger-mugger, &c.

Studious—desirous.

Studious of his ease—careful of his comfort.

64-67. **PARAPHRASE**:—At first, however, the arms were badly formed, and wanted that gently widening curve, which subsequently rendered them so comfortable. Projecting straight, they hurt the side and crushed the ribs and, being placed inconveniently high, they brought the shoulders in contact with the ears.

64. **With easy slope**—Adverbial adjunct to 'receding' below; with slope giving ease.

65. **Receding wide**—(*i. e.*) wide at the front but narrow at the back.

66. **Bruised**—hurt.

Elevated—Complement to subject 'they' (the elbows raised high at the back.)

68-71 **PARAPHRASE**:—Though thus closely confined and uncomfortable behind, our hardy forefathers long bore their lot without a murmur. The more delicate ladies, as was natural, first complained.

68. **Or e'er**—ere ever. "Or" is an old form of *ere* and the use of *ever*, here corresponds to its use in such compounds as *whatever*, *wherever*—that is, gives a touch of universality or indefiniteness to the sense.

Rugged sires—rude uncivilised ancestors.

Complained, though incommodiously pent in,
And ill at ease behind. The ladies first 70
'Gan murmur, as became the softer sex.
Ingenious Fancy, never better pleased
Than when employed to accommodate the fair,
Heard the sweet moan with pity, and devised
The soft settee; one elbow at each end,
And in the midst an elbow it received,

69. **Incommodiously**—painfully.

Pent in—confined.

70. **Ill at ease**—uncomfortable.

71. **Gan**—began In old English *gan* was used as an auxiliary like the modern *did* A. S *ginnan*, to begin. The apostrophe is therefore not etymologically justifiable.

As became—as was natural.

72-77. **PARAPHRASE:**—Men of ingenuity to whom nothing is more pleasing than to gratify the fair sex heard with concern their tender sighs, and contrived for them the soft settee. Having an arm at each end and one in the middle, it accommodated two persons at the same time, who could thus sit together on the same seat, though separated by one of its elbows.

72. **Ingenious Fancy**—the imagination of persons having an aptitude to form new combinations—Inventive contrivance; abstract used for concrete, the expression standing for men with inventive faculty.

74. **The sweet moan**—the complaint of the ladies. Why sweet? Because uttered by the *fair*.

Sweet—Exciting our sympathy.

75. **Settee**—A long seat with a back to it; from *set*.

United yet divided, twain at once.
So sit two kings of Brentford on one throne ;
And so two citizens, who take the air,
Close packed, and smiling, in a chaise and one. 80

78-80. **PARAPHRASE** :—In the same manner two kings of Brentford are represented sitting on the same throne ; and thus do two citizens, take a drive in a one-horse chaise. in which they sit cramped but contented.

78. **Two kings of Brentford**—"It is said that a Saxon king conferred the distinction of royalty upon the two chief Magistrates of this ancient town, who were originally elected from the two principal crafts, *viz.*, millers and tanners. The first notice of them in literature is in the Duke of Buckingham's play of the *Rehearsal.*" In act ii, scene 2, the two kings of Brentford enter 'hand in hand ;' and the actors, to heighten the absurdity, generally made them 'smelling at one nosegay.'

There is probably no historical foundation for any king of Brentford, which is a dirty town on the Thames, opposite Kew, 5 miles from London.

Take the air—go for a drive.

80. **Smiling**—with pleasure at the rare enjoyment of a drive.

One—(*i.e.*) one horse.

But relaxation of the languid frame,
By soft recumbency of outstretched limbs,
Was bliss reserved for happier days. So slow
The growth of what is excellent ; so hard
To attain perfection in this nether world. 85
Thus first Necessity invented stools,
Convenience next suggested elbow-chairs,
And luxury the accomplished SOFA last.

81-85. **PARAPHRASE** :—But up to this time no one had the good luck of resting his weary body by stretching out at full length his limbs. This comfort was reserved for more happy days (our days). This is only an instance of the very slow way in which good things come into existence ; this is only another instance of the difficulties that men undergo in reaching perfection.

81. **Languid frame**—the body, exhausted with toil.

Relaxation—Repose.

82. **By soft recumbency &c.**—By lying down.

84. **What**—whatever.

85. **So hard to attain**—difficult to obtain. These words, which are more commonly used of moral or mental perfection, are here playfully used with reference to improvement of bodily comfort. Cowper may be said to laugh at himself here.

Nether world—The earth ; it is called nether (lower) with reference to the world above or heaven.

88. **Luxury**—a higher degree of comfort.

Accomplished—perfect, unimprovable, complete in comfort.

The nurse sleeps sweetly, hired to watch the sick.
Whom snoring she disturbs. As sweetly he 90
Who quits the coach-box at the midnight hour
To sleep within the carriage more secure,
His legs depending at the open door.
Sweet sleep enjoys the curate in his desk,

89-93. **PARAPHRASE** :—The nurse, whose noisy snoring distresses the sick man she is employed to attend upon, sleeps soundly. Equally sound is the slumber of the coachman, who leaves his driving box at midnight, that he may sleep more safely and comfortably in the carriage, with his legs dangling from the open door.

89. **The nurse &c.**—who of course ought not, under the circumstances to sleep at all, enjoys her slumber all the more because stolen pleasures are sweet.

90. **Snoring**—by her snoring.

He—the driver.

91. **Who quits &c.**—who leaves the coach box when it is very cold in the midnight.

92. **More secure**—than he could be on the box.

93. **Depending**—hanging out from; an instance of Cowper's fondness for Latinism. L. *dependo*, to hang down.

94-102. **PARAPHRASE** :—The curate sleeps sweetly over his desk, as also does the clerk beneath him, while the Rector above them mumbles over his dull sermon: but neither the sleep of the idle nurse, who kills her patient by her snoring, nor that of the coach-man, who leaves his perch at mid-night to sleep more comfortably in the carriage: nor the sleep of the curate over his desk, nor the slumber of the clerk below him, can compare with the delicious rest afforded by the Sofa.

94. **Sleep**—object of "enjoys."

Curate &c.—'Curate' is literally one who has the care of souls. (*L. cura*, care). Originally the term was applied to any clergyman; now it is restricted to the assistant of a rector or vicar, who is the head of the parish and is entitled to the tithes.

The tedious rector drawling o'er his head, 95
And sweet the clerk below. But neither sleep
Of lazy nurse who snores the sickman dead,
Nor his who quits the box at midnight hour
To slumber in the carriage more secure,
Nor sleep enjoyed by curate in his desk, 100
Nor yet the dozings of the clerk, are sweet,
Compared with the repose the Sofa yields.
  Oh, may I live exempted (while I live
Guiltless of pampered appetite obscene)

---

95. **Tedious**—monotonous. (An absolute construction.)

97. **Snores the sickman dead**—Snores so loudly as to disturb the patient and hasten his death.

103-180. *ANALYSIS*:—*May I not be confined to the Sofa by gout, for I am a lover of country, and have been so from the time when I played truant to enjoy a country ramble. Then I needed no sofa on my return. Age robs us of our bodily power, but it has not robbed me of my enjoyment of nature or my bodily vigour. I appeal to the constant companion of my walks to attest the sincerity of my love of nature I recall the scene we have often gazed at together from a hill at Olney*—Storr.

103. **Exempted**—freed from.

104. **Guiltless &c.**—so long as I do not indulge in rich and injurious food.

Pampered appetite obscene—Sinful, unrestrained indulgence in sensual pleasures. This is a favourite arrangement of words with Milton. Comp. 'unreproved pleasures free,' 'human face divine;' native woodnotes wild' in *L'Allegro*. Also Gray's 'purest ray serene.' This use of an adjective both before or after the noun is called by Earle "the ambidextral adjective."

Pampered—indulged; glutted.

Appetite—sensual inclinations.

Obscene—indecent; productive of evil. Cf. the '*obscene* dread of Moab's sons.' (P. L. I. 406.)

From pangs arthritic, that infest the toe 105
Of libertine Excess! The Sofa suits
The gouty limb, 'tis true; but gouty limb,
Though on a Sofa, may I never feel:
For I have loved the rural walk through lanes
Of grassy swarth, close cropped by nibbling sheep 110

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105. **Pangs Arthritic**—pangs that attack the joint.

Arthritic—gouty. (Gk. *arthros*, a joint.)

Infests—troubles frequently.

105. **The toe**—The gout is often felt in the toe, but it also attacks the joints of the hands.

106. **Libertine excess**—The man who indulges without restraints; (abstract used for concrete.)

109. **For I have &c.**—the poem now glides away from its title theme, the Sofa, to descriptions of rural scenes, the charms of solitude, &c. Observe how the transition is effected. Sofas are useful for gouty limbs; the poet, nevertheless, hopes that, though he likes a sofa, he may never have gout, for he is fond of walking; when he walks he sees rural scenes; so he launches out into a description of such scenes: and, except in the link of connection in lines 126, 127, the sofa is entirely forgotten.

The sense is—It has been my practice, and still continues to be, to walk, &c. The use of the perfect does not here mean that the action is completed and done with.

110. **Swarth**—'a line of grass or corn cut by the scythe.' Cowper seems to have confused it with or at any rate used it as synonymous with, '*Sward*' or 'turf.'

Close cropped &c.—*i.e.* the nibbling sheep ate up the grass close to the ground.

Nibbling—eating in small bits.

And skirted thick with intertexture firm
Of thorny boughs ; have loved the rural walk
O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink,
E'er since a truant boy I passed my bounds
To enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames ; 115
And still remember, nor without regret

111. **Skirted**—bordered.

Skirted thick—having a thick or dense border.

Intertexture &c.—thorn branches closely interwoven.

113. **By river's brink**—Poets have always been lovers of rivers.

114. **Truant**—wandering without leave.

Bounds—the limits beyond which the boys of the school were forbidden to stray. Cowper is referring to his Westminster School days.

115. **The Banks of Thames**—While Cowper was at Westminster School, London, for 8 years.

117. **Of hours**—Of = about ; concerning.

116-122. PARAPHRASE :—And I still call to mind, with a fond recollection those days, which subsequent grief has rendered dear to me, how often, when, wandering far from home, I had consumed my provisions, and had no money to purchase more, I appeased my hunger with the bright red hips or hawthorn berries, or with blooming crab apples, or with the black berries, that adorn the bramble, or with the dry and bitter fruits of the blackthorn.

Of hours that sorrow since has much endeared,
How oft, my slice of pocket stare consumed,
Still hungering, pennyless and far from home.)
I fed on scarlet hips and stony haws, 120
Or blushing crabs, or berries that emboss
The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere,

117. **That sorrow, &c**—The wretchedness he has since experienced makes him look back with deeper regret on his youthful happiness. Tennyson (Locksley Hall) calls this 'a sorrow's crown of sorrows.'

118. **My slice of pocket store consumed**—an absolute construction, the clause being adjectival to 'I' in l. 120. The small store of food, bread and cheese or some such simple fare which he had put in his pocket —Whatever I had in my pocket being used up during the earlier part of the ramble.

120. **I fed &c.**—I satisfied my hunger with the fruits of the dog-rose and fruits of the hawthorn tree.

Hips—the fruit of the brier or wild rose.

Haws—the fruit of the hawthorn.

121. **Crabs**—wild sour apples.

Berries that Emboss &c.—Black-berries that stud or appear on the bramble bush like the *bosses* or knobs upon a shield.

Emboss—decorate with bunches.

122. **Sloes austere**—'Sloes' are small bitter plum-like fruits of the black-thorn.

Austere—acid, bitter. Latin, "austerus," auster is the dry south wind. Notice the humour which consists in using in its literal sense a word which we only use figuratively.

Cowper was never proof against the temptation of using high-sounding Latin polysyllables. He coins new words from Latin, and often uses old words in their primitive Latin sense.

In defence of Cowper's Latinised style a critic suggests: "Did not Cowper's grandiloquent words arise, in part at least, from his playfulness and sense of humour? He often seems to me to be laughing at himself like Lamb as he coins them."

Hard fare! but such as boyish appetite
Disdains not; nor the palate, undepraved
By culinary arts, unsavoury deems. 125
No Sofa then awaited my return;
Nor Sofa then I needed. Youth rapairs
His waisted spirits quickly, by long toil

123. **Hard fare**: 'fare' is in apposition with the various fruits described above, taken collectively. *Fare* is used here in its radical meaning of 'food needed for a journey,' from A. S. *faran*, to travel.

124. **Nor** = And not

Palate—Taste.

Undepraved by culinary arts—unspoilt by artificial flavours; not vitiated by highly seasoned rich dishes.

Culinary—(L. *culina*, a kitchen) pertaining to the kitchen.

127. **No sofa &c.**—Here the poet practically bids farewell to the theme of his song. What he says next is wholly unconnected with the *sofa*.

Repairs—brings back, renews, restores. Notice the difference between this word which is from L. *reparo* to renew, and *repair*, to proceed, go, which is from *re-patriare* to re-visit one's country.

128. **Wasted**—tired, exhausted,

Toil—labour. This word is connected with *till*, to dress and plough the ground. Another word, *toil*, meaning a net or snare is from L. *tela*, a web or loom.

Incurring short fatigue; and though our years,
As life declines, speed rapidly away, 130
And not a year but pilfers as he goes
Some youthful grace, that age would gladly keep:
A tooth or auburn lock, and by degrees
Their length and colour from the locks they spare;

129-140. Construe—'Though our years, as life declines, speed rapidly away, and each one pilfers, as he goes, some useful grace that the person growing aged would gladly keep, such as a tooth or auburn lock, and though by degrees they (the years) pilfer the colour from those locks which they spare (do not pilfer), mine (my years) have not yet pilfered the elastic spring of an unwearied foot, &c.' The first or introductory part of the sentence, all under the influence, of 'though,' ends at 'spare;' the second and principal part of the sentence, which makes the assertion, begins at 'mine.'

130. **Declines**—draws towards a close.

131. **Not a year but**—There is not a year which does not.

Pilfers—steals.

132. **Grace**—beauty.

Age—abstract for the concrete, aged persons.

140. Compare Wordsworth's line,

"My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky;" and in particular the line composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, containing the still more touching address to the companion of his walk, his sister Dorothy.''

133. **Auburn**—originally it meant what we now call flaxen hair; now applied to a rich reddish gold hair.

134. **They spare,**—*i.e.* the years do not pilfer.

The elastic spring of an unwearied foot, 135
That mounts the stile with ease, or leaps the fence,
That play of lungs, inhaling and again
Respiring freely the fresh air, that makes
Swift pace or steep ascent no toil to me,
Mine have not pilfered yet; nor yet impaired 140
My relish of fair prospect; scenes that soothed
Or charmed me young, no longer young, I find

135. **Elastic**—light, springy.

136. **Stile**—a set of steps for climbing over a fence.

137. **Play of lungs.**—free working of the lungs.

137. **Inhaling,** L. *in* and *halo*, I breathe ;brething in.

Respiring (L. *re* back, and *spiro*, I breathe) exhaling.

140. **Impaired,** made worse.

140-141. **Impaired my relish etc.**—Weakend my admiration for or destroyed my power of enjoying, a fine view.

Prospect—(L. *pro* forward, and *specio* to see). The new region embraced by the eye in vision at one time;

141. **Rellish of,** Admiration for.

Fair prospect—fine view.

142. **Young**—the first *Young* qualifies 'me'; the second qualifies 'I.'

Still soothing, and of power to charm me still,
And witness, dear companion of my walks,
Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive 145
Fast locked in mine, with pleasure such as love,
Confirmed by long experience of thy worth
And well-tried virtues, could alone inspire—

144-149. **PARAPHRASE** :—And thou, beloved partner of my rambles, who hast accompanied me during the last twenty years, and whose arm, entwined with mine, I now feel with that delight which friendship, strengthened by a long trial of thy faithful and virtuous character alone can give, can'st bear testimony to a pleasure which thou hast so long enhanced.

144. **Dear Companion etc.**—Mrs. Unwin.

This graceful record of affection for Mrs. Unwin was probably added in a revisal, between 1783 (when the Task was commenced) and 1785 (when it was published). Cowper first met Mary Unwin a few weeks after he settled at Huntingdon, June 22, 1765.

145. **Twentieth winter**—1765-1785. Cowper lived with the Unwins from 1765 till Mrs. Unwin's death in 1796. A remarkable use of a Latin idiom. We should ordinarily say, 'have perceived' for twenty winters.

146. **Fast lock'd**—for support during their walk.
Love—friendship, friendly affection.

147. **Confirm'd**—strengthened.

148. **Well-tried**—thoroughly tested and proved.
Alone—goes closely with, love. This love only, and nothing else, could inspire such a feeling of pleasure.

Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.
Thou knowest my praise of nature most sincere, 150
And that my raptures are not conjured up
To serve occasions of poetic pomp,

Witness—He invites Mrs. Unwin to bear testimony to the fact that his admiration of Nature is genuine.

149. **Joy**—pleasure derived from the contemplation of natural scenery.

Hast doubled—Mrs. Unwin's companionship and sympathy enhanced the pleasure of looking at the view.

150-153. **PARAPHRASE** :—Thou can'st testify that my praise of Nature's beauties is no mere pretence, that my joys are not feigned to meet the requirements of poetical ornament but that they are real, and thou hast sympathised with them to the full.

150-179. *N.B.*—Cowper's love of Nature is beautifully expressed in these lines, and also in lines 109-15. In a letter to Mr. Newton the poet says:—"Oh, I could spend whole days and nights together in feeding on a lovely prospect! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow. If every human being on earth could think for one quarter of an hour as I have done for many years there might perhaps be many miserable men among them, but not one unawakened one could be found from the arctic to the antartic circle."

Q. Quote from 'the Sofa' lines illustrating Cowper's love of Nature.

150. **Thou etc.**—The construction is: as "thou knowest (that) my praise of nature (is) most sincere.

151. **Raptures**—enthusiastic descriptions of Nature.

Conjured up—brought about by magic enchantment, or trickery.

152. **To serve occasions**—to supply the requirements of ornate poetic diction. He means that his admiration is not pretended, for the sake of putting it down in verse, but is a real feeling.

151-152. **EXPLANATION** :—I do not pretend to have strong feelings—I really possess them. In other words, my raptures are real and not feigned for the purpose of making a display of beauty in my poetry.

But genuine, and art partner of them all.)
How oft upon yon eminence our pace
Has slackened to a pause, and we have borne 155
The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,

153. **But genuine**—They are not pretending.

Art partner of them all—hast partaken with me in all these joys.

Explain clearly :—

> My raptures are not conjured up
> To serve occasions of poetic pomp.
> But genuine, and art partner of them all.

154. **Yon eminence**—the yonder hill. *Yon* serves to make the picture more vivid. Here follows an exact description of a walk across fields from Olney to Weston. There is a gradual ascent to the hill called the Cliff, overhanging the Ouse, on the grounds of Weston House, two or three fields west of Cowper's residence.

153-154. **Our pace has slackened to a pause**—By going slower and slower we at length stopped.

To a pause—till we stood still.

156. **Ruffling**—boisterous, disorderly. They were so wrapt in the view that they were heedless of the rough wind.

While Admiration, feeding at the eye,
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene!
Thence with what pleasure have we just discerned
The distant plough slow moving, and beside 160

157-58. **While admiration etc.**—supplying itself by means of the eye (*i.e.*, by watching the landscape) with subjects on which to exercise itself. A very beautiful idea. While the beautiful scene before us held us in admiration which long gazing failed to satisfy. The eye is the organ through which admiration, *i. e.*, the admiring mind, draws in its nourishment.

Cf.—Wordsworth's lines.

> "Far and wide the clouds were touched,
> And in their silent faces could he read
> Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
> Nor any voice of joy; his *spirit drank*
> *The spectacle*;"
>
> *Excursion*, ll. 203-6.

> "They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude."
>
> *Daffodils*, ll. 21-22.

158. **Unsated**—Unsatisfied, not having enough.

159-162. **PARAPHRASE**:—How pleasant was it to stand there and behold the tardy plough, drawn by toiling horses, that never wandered from the proper path, and the hardy ploughman by their side, appearing no larger than a boy.

159. **Just discerned**—not very distinctly seen; only so far as enabled us to understand that it was a plough.

Just—Without difficulty.

His labouring team that swerved not from the track,
The sturdy swain diminished to a boy!
Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,

161. **His**—refers to 'swain' in line 162.

Team—his horses. Horses, not oxen, are used in most parts of England for ploughing.

That swerved not—that moved straight forward.

Teem that swerved not—Two horses that continued dragging the plough straight on.

162. **The sturdy swain &c.**: The strong-bodied peasant looking like a boy by reason of the distance (an absolute construction).

To a boy—to a boy's size.

163-166. **PARAPHRASE**:—In one direction the enchanted eye traces the meandering course of the Ouse, which flows in gentle curves through a flat expanse of extensive meadows, lively with grazing cattle.

163. **Ouse**: The great Ouse which flows into the Wash was Cowper's favourite river.

164 **Meads**—meadows, that is, flat grass land on the borders of a river.

Conducts the eye along his sinuous course 165
Delighted. There, fast rooted in his bank,
Stand, never overlooked, our favourite elms,
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut.

165. **Conducts, &c.**—leads the eye. When one catches sight of a bend (sinuosity) in the sinuous course of the river, the eye naturally follows it, and is so led on from reach to reach of the river.

His—refers to the Ouse. Rivers are usually masculine when used as proper names, so we have Father Thames, but not always, for the Severn when addressed as 'Sabrina Fair' (Milton's Comus) is feminine.

Sinuous: Meandering; zigzag; winding.

166-180. **PARAPHRASE**:—There our favourite elms, which we never fail to glance at, stand firmly fixed in their bank, and shelter the lonely cottage of the herdsman; while far away across the river, that looks like a line of molten glass traversing the valley, the land seems to melt gradually into the clouds exhibiting a scene diversified with many beauties, the countless graces of the hedgerow, the massive square tower and the tapering spire of the church whose merry bells are barely audible to the attentive ear, woods, heaths, and distant smoking hamlets. Those scenes must indeed be lovely, which never fail to please us, although we see them daily, and whose freshness still remains, after we have known and examined them for years, and the scenes I have described are fairly entitled to this credit.

167. **Never overlooked**: Never neglected, or passed without notice. They are so tall that none can see over them; or they are so prominent that none can help noticing them.

Elms. Here is an error. The 'elms' should be 'poplars.' The editor of Cowper Illustrated (Lond. 1803, p. 45) says, 'We have received a communication from Mr. Courtenay, who observes that Cowper wrote the passage which refers to these trees, under the influence of a mistake, and he had often told him of the circumstance.'

168. **Screen**: Shelter.

While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,
That as with molten glass, inlays the vale, 170
(The sloping land recedes into the clouds ;)
Displaying on its varied side the grace
O hedgerow beauties numberless, square tower,
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
Just undulates upon the listening ear, 175
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote

169. **Overthwart**—Across ; beyond ; on the other side of.

170. **As with molten glass,** because it is smooth, and shining.

171. **Recedes into the clouds**, *i.e.*, into the horizon where the earth appears to meet the sky. 'The land gradually sloping seems as if it merges into the clouds.'

172. **Varied**—picturesque from the variety of objects which it presents.

173. **Hedge-row beauties,** wild flowers growing on the hedges ; simple rural beauties.

Square tower, that of the Church at Clifton.

174. **Tall spire,** at Olney.

175. **Undulates**—reaches the ear now softer now louder, thus rising and falling like a wave. Floats in waves of sound rising loud and falling low by turns.

Cf. 'Winter Walk at Noon':—

How soft the music of those village bells
Falling at intervals upon the ear
In cadence sweet ! now dying all away,
Now pealing loud again and louder still, &c.

176. **Smoking**—from the chimney-tops.

Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily viewed,
Please daily, and whose novelty survives
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years—
Praise justly due to those that I describe. 180
Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,
Exhilarate the spirit, and restore

177-180. **Whose novelty &c.** Which continue to be still new though known for a long time and examined during many years.

"The truth rather seems to be that no landscape is so flat and tame (and the scenery of the eastern counties of which Cowper writes is flat and tame), as not to possess a peculiar beauty of its own, and this beauty will ever grow upon a true lover of nature."—*Storr.*

177. **Daily viewed**—though daily viewed.

178. **Please daily**—continue to please day after day as we are never tired of them. There is no great beauty in the scenery about Olney. Weston is a pretty village, but Cowper is speaking of the general aspect of the country round. The beauty arose from his poetic mind which, like Wordsworth's saw beauties which others failed to descry.

Novelty—freshness.

179. **Long knowledge**—long familiarity with them (scenes).

Scrutiny of years—minute perusal or examination throughout a number of years.

180. **Praise, &c.**—And this praise I can honestly bestow on these scenes.

181-209. *ANALYSIS:—From rural sights the author passes to rural sounds—the wind in the forest, the distant waterfall or near fountain or rill, the sounds of birds which, even when harsh, please by contrast with the peaceful scene.*—Storr.

181. **Nor, &c.**—It is not only rural sights, but, &c.

182. **Exhilarate**—enliven.

Spirit—more usually, perhaps, spirits. We speak of being in good (*i.e*, cheerful) spirits, not spirit.

The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike 185
The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,
And lull the spirit while they fill the mind;
Unnumbered branches waving in the blast,

183. **Tone**—the braced condition of the nerves; the healthy state or action. From Gk. *teino* to stretch. Literally, it means, the 'stretching' or 'straining' of the strings of a musical instrument to the desired pitch.

Restore...Languid Nature—Give fresh vigour to wearied human nature.

184. **Sweep the skirt**, brush the borders.

185. **Make music, &c.**, as in the sound of pine trees, cedars, &c.

183-189. **Mighty winds...once**—Notice how the poet closely observed the workings of Nature. The forest is extensive; the trees being of ancient growth are strong and large. The mighty wind makes "all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once." The poet cannot see the inside of the forest. He sees the wind sweeping only its skirt and hears the roar and likens it to the dash of ocean billows

186. **His**—of the ocean.

187. **And lull &c.**—And *mighty winds* lull the spirit, &c.

The spirit...the mind—No distinct opposition is intended to be made between '*spirit*' and '*mind*' in this line.

Lull the spirit &c.—soothe the feelings, while they elevate the sentiments.

189. **Unnumbered**—innumerable. Milton has in *L'Allegro*, '*unreproved*' for irreprovable.

Branches—The construction is absolute.

188—89. **PARAPHRASE:**—All the very many branches of the trees are moved at once by the wind and the fluttering rapid movements up and down of all the leaves produced this sound which is so pleasant to hear.

And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.)
Nor less composure waits upon the roar 190
Of distant floods, or on the softer voice
Of neighbouring fountain, or of rills that slip
Through the cleft rock, and, chimings as they fall
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length

190—96. **PARAPHRASE :**—Nor is the tumult of the remote torrents less soothing to the mind, nor the gentle ripple of an adjoining fountain, nor the purling stream, that flows through a chink in the rock, whose water, gurgling as it tumbles over the loose stones, spreads over the ground and is lost in the long thick grass, the brighter green of which alone marks its now noiseless path.

190. **Nor less &c.**—The same soothing effect (composure) results from &c.

Waits upon—attends; follows; is the result of hearing.

191. **Softer voice**—gentler sound.

192. **Rills**—streamlets.

Slip—slide; glide

193. **Cleft rock**—*i.e.* through a cleft or chasm in the rock.

193. **Chiming**—Properly used of bells; expresses also any pleasing sounds or harmonious arrangement.

194. **Pebbles**, stones worn smooth by the water.

Lose themselves, are lost.

In matted grass, that with a livelier green 195
Betrays the secret of their silent course.)
(Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,
But animated nature sweeter still,

Matted, intertwisted, and thick by the fertilizing action of the water.

195. **Livelier**—More living *i. e.*, brighter.

196. **Betrays, &c.,** shows where the hidden water runs, by the brighter colour of the grass in its neighbourhood; shows by its brighter hue where the water flows, though the water itself cannot be seen. Wordsworth has

"By their onward lapse
Betray to sight the motion of the stream
Else imperceptible."

197—99. **Nature...human ear**—The sounds of nature's inanimate objects are pleasing and gratifying to the ear; but those of living creatures are still more so.

Cowper elsewhere expresses the sentiment of these lines thus;—It strikes me as a very observable instance of providential kindness to man, that such an accord has been contrived between the ear and the sounds with which at last in a rural situation it is almost every moment visited.

He says in one of his *Letters*, to Rev. John Newton, 'All the sounds that Nature utters are delightful, at least in this country.'

197. **Nature inanimate**—Such as winds, ocean, wood, &c., before described,

200—209. **PARAPHRASE:**—Thousands of singing birds enliven the day with their song, and one sings during the whole night, and not only am I pleased with these, whose song the delicate skill of the artist can never rival, but am delighted also with the noisy rooks, the screaming kites that circle round high up in the air, the jay, the pie, and even the owl that hoots at the rising of the moon. Jarring, harsh sounds, may yet, when heard in quiet peaceful spots, give pleasure from their association in the mind with those places.

198. **Animated nature,** birds and beasts.

To soothe and satisfy the human ear.
Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one 200

199. **Satisfy,** gratify

200. **Ten thousand &c.**—The cheerful note of various kinds of birds is heard in the day.

200. **Warblers,** singing birds.

Cheer the day, make the day cheerful.

One, the nightingale.

200. **And one &c**—In full:—And *one warbler* cheers the live-long night. The statement is not quite correct, as another bird named the *blackcap* also sings at night.

The poet here refers to the nightingale. This bird visits our groves only in the spring and summer months, and leaves us in August. It is found chiefly in the south and east of England. The nightingale not only sings in the night, but also during the day when the female is sitting on the eggs. This bird is universally esteemed for its vocal powers. It is frequently spoken of by the poets. Milton has:—

"To their nests
Were slunk all the *wakeful* nightingale."
—*Par. Lost,* IV. 601.

"'Less Philomel will deign a song."
—*Il Pensoroso,* l. 56.

Coleridge thus beautifully describes the song of the nightingale:—

"And hark! the nightingale begins his song,
He crowds, and hurries and precipitates,
With fast thick warble, his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love chant, and disburden his soul of all its music!"

The livelong night: nor those alone, whose notes
Nice-fingered Art must emulate in vain,
But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
In still-repeated circles, screaming loud,

201. **The livelong night**, all night long.

Livelong—Long in passing, tedious. The word is compounded, not of the verb '*live*' but of the adjective '*live*' and '*long*.' *These*—Nom. to *have* understood.—(nor *have* these alone charms for me, but &c.)

These alone, the singing birds referred to

202. **Nice-finger'd art**—The musician. Abstract for the concrete. *Nice-fingered* because the excellence of the music of all stringed instrument depends on the touch.

Must emulate in vain, cannot but fail in imitating.

201—02. **Explanation**:—Notes which no musician. however skilful, can reproduce on his instrument; the rivalling of whose melody will always baffle the most accurate attempts at imitation.

Q. **Explain**:—

" ......Whose notes
Nice-Fingered Art must emulate in vain "

203. **Cawing**—The word *caw* is an imitation of the cry of the rook. Such imitative words are called *onomatopœic*. Cf. *rattle*, *clash*, *dash*, *murmur*.

Rooks—The *rook* is a social bird, fond of living abou the abodes of man, and even of building in the heart of crowded cities.

Kites, a rapacious bird of the hawk kind.

Sublime—Lat. *sublimis*, high; it is here used in the literal sense of, high in the air; the word is used more often in the figurative sense of 'grand.'

204. **In still repeated circles &c.**—In ever-recumbent circles—This well describes the flight of the kites.

Still, constantly.

The jay, the pie, and even the boding owl 205
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.

205. **Jay**—The *jay* is the most showy bird of the crow kind in Britain, and is distinguished, not only for the beautiful arrangement of its colours, but for its harsh grating notes. It possesses the power of imitating human voice.

Pie—The *pie* or magpie, which belongs to the crow family is a bold, hardy,and restless bird, living upon insects, grain, flesh of all sorts, and whatever birds he can master. Like other birds of its kind, the pie is addicted to stealing and hoarding.

Boding—Foreshowing evil; ill-omened. The cry or hoot of the owl is supposed to portend misfortune.

The boding owl—the owl is a bird of evil omen in all countries.

206. **Hails the rising moon.**—Welcomes the moon as she rises.

Compare :—

"The moping owl does to the moon complain".

Gray's Elegy. l. 10.

Have charms for me—In line 177, Cowper speaks of sights. Here he discusses sounds which, generally supposed to be harsh, have a certain pleasure for his ear.

Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,
Yet heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns,
And only there, please highly for their sake.
(Peace to the artist whose ingenious thought 210
Devised the weather-house, that useful toy!
Fearless of humid air and gathering rains,
Forth steps the man—an emblem of myself!
More delicate his timorous mate retires.)

207—09. **Sounds inharmonious, &c.**—Cowper thus writes in one of his letters respecting rural sounds:—"The notes of all our birds and fowls please me without one exception. I should not indeed think of keeping a goose in a cage, that I might hang him up in the parlour for the sake of his melody, but a goose upon a common, or in a farm yard, is no bad performer: and as to insects, if the black beetle, and beetles indeed of all hues, will keep out of my way, I have no objection to any of the rest; on the contrary in whatever key they sing, from the goat's fine treble to the bass of the humble bee, I admire them all. Seriously however, it strikes me as a very observable instance of providential kindness to man, that such an accord has been contrived between his ear and the sounds with which, at least in a rural situation, it is almost every moment visited."

207. **In themselves**, abstractedly, without reference to the surroundings.

208. **Where Peace, &c.,** which are uniformly and always peaceful.

209. **For their sake,** on account of the association.

Please highly for their Sake—Give great pleasure from their being associated in the mind with those peaceful scenes.

210—51. *ANALYSIS:—Description of a sequestered cottage discovered by the poet in a solitary winter ramble. Reflections thereupon; the charms of silence and retirement counter-balance by the want of comfort; a spot to visit, not to dwell in.*—Storr.

210—14. **Paraphrase**:—May the skilful mechanic, whose inventive faculty contrived the ingenious and useful weatherhouse, for ever rest in peace! The puppet man, comes forth, undaunted by damp air or threatening rain as I do in rainy weather; his female companion more sensitive to wet keeps timidly inside.

210. **Artist**—Now, one who cultivates the fine arts, as painting, sculpture, music, &c. But the word was formerly applied to one skilled in the *liberal* arts, such as mathematics. The term *artisan* now applied to those who practise the *common* arts, was formerly applied to those who practised the *fine* arts, so that the two words have entirely reversed their original meaning. Here, an artizan or a mechanic.

Cf.:—(1) "The wise and fool, the *artist* and *unread*,
The hard and soft seemed all affined and kin.',
—SHAKESPEARE, *Troilus and Cressida*. i. 3.
(2) "Rare *artisan*, whose pencil moves
Not our delights alone, but loves!"—WALLER.

This word is now generally restricted to denote one who practises the fine arts, as music, painting, and sculpture.

Ingenious thought, inventive faculty.

211. **Weather-House**—Weather-house is a philosophical toy, or an instrument for showing the degree of moisture in the atmosphere. It may, therefore, be termed a *hygrometer* (Gr. *hygros*, moist, and *metron*, measure), that is a *measure of moisture*. This toy consists of a small house which has two open doors, and two images of a man and woman that are placed on a kind of lever. If the air is *moist*—an indication of *wet* weather—the *man* comes out; but in *fair* weather, when the atmosphere is *dry*, the woman makes her appearance. The mode of action of this hygrometer is the following:—The lever on which the two figures are placed is sustained by catgut, which is very sensible to moisture. When, therefore, the air is moist, the catgut lengthens, and 'forth steps the man; when the air is dry, the catgut contracts, and then the man goes in and the woman comes out.

212. **Humid**, moist; L. *humidus*.

213. **Emblem of myself**—One doing as I do (even when it rains).

Q. Explain fully:—
"*Emblem of myself*."

When Winter soaks the fields, and female feet, 215
Too weak to struggle with tenacious clay,
Or ford the rivulets, are best at home,
The task of new discoveries falls on me.
At such a season, and with such a charge,
Once went I forth; and found, till then unknown, 220

214 **Timorous Mate**,—Timid temale companion (i.e.) the figure of the woman in the weather-house. In Cowper's own case, Mrs. Unwin.

215-18. **PARAPHRASE**—When the ground is wet with the winter rain, it is most fit that my companion, who is too feeble to walk through the tough mud, or cross the shallow streams should remain at home, and leave me to explore new scenes alone. Cowper was an inveterate walker in all weather, good or bad.

215. **Soaks**—Drenches, drowns.

216. **Tenacious**—Holding fast. Lat. *teneo*, to hold.

219-27. **PARAPHRASE**:—With such an intention. I once went out in damp weather, and discovered a cottage, of whose existence we did not know before, though we now frequently walk thither' It stands on the top of a verdant hill, but is so closely surrounded by a circle of spreading elms, whose boughs hang over its roof. that the cottage is completely hidden itself, though it commands a view of the valley beneath ; this low cottage is so thickly encompassed with the dark exuberant foliage, that I named it the *peasant's nest*.

219. **With such a charge**—A *charge*, *i. e.*, to make new discoveries. Lat. *carrus*, a car, what is given to be carried.

A cottage, whither oft we since repair :
'Tis perched upon the green hill-top but close
Environed with a ring of branching elms,
That overhang the thatch, itself unseen
Peeps at the vale below ; so thick beset 225
With foliage of such dark redundant growth,

221-47. **A cottage** &c.—This cottage, since the days of the poet, has been displaced by a more modern and less poetic structure.

221. **Repair**—Go ; resort. The word is also transitive in the sense of *mend*.

223. **Close environed** &c—Enlargement to Subj. *itself*.

Environed, surrounded.

Ring of branching elms, spreading elm-trees which encircle it.

224. **Thatch** , Cottages and small houses, especially in the country, are often roofed with thatch ; the straw covering of the roof.

225. **Peeps at,** commands a view of.

224-225. **EXPLANATION** :—But though itself unseen, from being closely environed, it peeps at the valley below.—STORR.

225. **So thick beset,** because it was so closely hidden.

In full : So thick *is it* beset, &c.

226. **Redundant**—Luxuriant, abundant. The word now usually means *more than sufficient* ; a word, for instance, quite unnecessary is said to be *redundant*.

I called the low-roofed lodge the '*peasant's nest*.'
And hidden as it is, and far remote
From such unpleasing sounds as hunt the ear
In village or in town, the bay of curs 230

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227. In a like manner Wordsworth used to name the various scenes in his neighbourhood.

Peasant nest—Now a farmstead; no longer thatched but tiled; with a well sunk; and the surrounding trees cleared.—GRIFFITH.

228-33. **And hidden as it is—mind**—The order is:—And I have often wished the peaceful covert mine, hidden as it is, and far remote from such unpleasing sounds as haunt the ear, &c.

PARAPHRASE:—Often have I wished to possess that quiet retreat, which is completely hidden from the vulgar gaze, and beyond the reach of those unpleasant sounds which oppress the ears in populous places—such as the unceasing bark of the angry dogs, the ringing of hammers, the grating sound of the wheels of carriages, and the loud cries of fractious noisy children.

228. **Hidden as it is**—Nearly equivalent to, *because it is hidden*. The *participle* "being" is similarly used: thus "it being good I shall take it."—That is, because (or as) it is good &c. *As it is*—As it is *hidden*. An adverbial sentence of manner to *hidden*. *Hidden* and *remote* are adjectives qualifying *covert*.

229. **As haunt—town**—If *as* = *which*, this is an adjective sentence to *sounds*. If taken as a conjunctive adverb, we must make a new sentence, thus: as those *sounds are* which haunt.

Haunt the ear—Come to the ear frequently and continually.

Haunt, annoy incessantly.

229-36. Throughout the poem, we find evidence of the retiring character of the poet; in these lines it is made prominent.

230. **The Bay of Curs**—The barking of the dogs. BAY—Barking.

Curs, common, worthless dogs; mongrels.

Incessant, clinking hammers, grinding wheels,
At infants clamorous whether pleased or pained,
Oft have I wished the peaceful covert mine,
Here, I have said, at least I should possess
The poet's treasure, silence, and indulge 235
The dreams of fancy, tranquil and secure.

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231. **Clinking hammers**: The sound made by hammers falling on iron. Cf.:—

"I hear the village hammer clink."—Tennyson's *In Mem.*

Grinding wheels: The sound made by the passage of wheeled carriage upon stony streets.

233. **Covert,** shelter.

234. **I have said**: I have thought to myself.

235. **The poet's treasure,** what the poet values most.

Silence: In app. to *treasure*' 'The poets treasure, silence'—Cf:—

(1) "Alas! to grottos and to groves we run
To ease and silence every Muse's son."
—Pope, *Hor*, 11. 2.

(2) "Silence is the rest of the soul,
And refreshes invention"—Bacon.

236. **Dreams of fancy,** poetic reveries or meditations.

"**Tranquil**" and "**Secure**" may be taken as adjectives to *I*, or adverbs modifying *indulge*.

EXPLANATION:—Here I thought, I should at any rate enjoy, what poets most desire *viz.*, peace and quietness and be able to let my imagination wander undisturbed.

234-36. **PARAPHRASE**:—Here I thought, I should obtain, what poets most desire, peace and indulge in dreams of fancy in undisturbed tranquillity.

Vain thought! the dweller in that still retreat
Dearly obtains the refuge it affords.
Its elevated site forbids the wretch
To drink sweet waters of the crystal well: 240
He dips his bowl into the weedy ditch
And heavy-laden, brings his beverage home,
Far fetched and little worth; nor seldom waits,
Dependent on the baker's punctual call,

237—46. **PARAPHRASE**:—It has been a foolish notion. The occupant of this quiet spot pays dearly for the tranquillity he obtains. Its lofty position prevents the unfortunate fellow from obtaining the pure spring water. The water he uses is scarcely drinkable, and even that he can obtain only at a distance: he plunges his vessel into a pool, overgrown with weeds and carries his heavy burden home. Often too he has to wait for the unpunctual baker on whom he has to depend for his supply of bread, and having eaten his last morsel, sits sadly and angrily, waiting to hear the creaking baskets that indicate the baker's approach.

237. **Vain thought**.—This does not mean that he would *not* possess the privileges described above, but that their possession would be marred by proportionate disadvantages.

238. **Dearly**, at a heavy cost.
239. **Wretch**, unfortunate fellow.
240. **Crystal**, clear, limpid.

242-243. **Beverage &c.**—In full:—And *he* heavy laden brings his beverage far fetched and little worth (that is of little value),home.

244. **Punctual**, the baker is *not* punctual, for the occupant of the cottage often has to wait. He is dependent on the baker's punctuality, *i.e.* his getting or not getting his supply of bread depends on the punctuality or unpunctuality of the baker.

Punctual, is from *punctum* a point, and means, exact to the time.

To hear his creaking panniers at the door, 245
Angry and sad, and his last crust consumed.
So farewell envy of the '*peasant nest!*'
If solitude make scant the means of life,
Society for me!—thou seeming sweet,
Be still a pleasing object in my view; 250

245. **Panniers**—baskets slung across the back of horse. The word is here used in its literal sense. Fr. *pannier* Lat. *panarium*, a bread-basket-*panis*, bread ; hence also *pantry*, *companion*.

246. **Angry** :—On account of the baker's delay.

And his last crust consumed—Nom. absolute. To join this with the adjectives *angry* and *sad*, as another qualification of *he*, is a somewhat loose grammatical construction, but allowable in poetry,

247—51. **PARAPHRASE** :—No more of envy then for the *peasant's nest*! I would live in human society. For society is preferable to solitude accompanied with scanty supplies. This seemiugly sweet peasant nest I will continue to visit, but never shall I desire to live in it.

247. **So farewell &c.** :—So *thou* envy of the peasant's nest, farewell. *Envy* is the nom. of address, and *farewell* may be considered an interjection, though strictly a verb in the imperative mood, and an adverb combined in one word.

249. **Society for Me.!** I choose society for myself. The form is idiomatic, and, as is usual with idioms, it is difficult to account for the syntax This is an elliptical form of expression : Such a word as *choose* may, however, be supplied to govern the noun.

Sweet is here a noun, equal to *sweet* or *pleasant object*, and in apposition with 'thou'.

'**Thou seeming sweet**' *i. e.*, in appearance only, at a distance. Comp. CAMPBELL'S *Pleasures of Hope* :—

" Tis distance lends enchantment to the view."

Seeming is here used as an adverb Cf:—

" Show of *seeming* pure "—Par. Lost IV, 316.

My visit still, but never mine abode.
Not distant far, a length of colonnade
Invite us: Monument of ancient taste,
Now scorned, but worthy of a better fate.

251. **My visit still &c.** In full: *Be thou, seeming sweet,* my visit still, but *be thou* never mine abode.

Visit here is somewhat peculiarly used for *visiting place* or a place for me to visit as distinguished from *abiding place.*

220—51. There is something *bourgeois* in these reflections of Cowper on the *Peasant's Nest.* All that the cottage suggests to him is, that it would be a delightful abode if it was not so very comfortable. There is a sonnet of Wordsworth so apposite, the occasion the same, the thoughts it suggests so far deeper and truer, that it is worth while to quote it *in extenso*:

ADMONITION TO A TRAVELLER.

"Yes' there is holy pleasure in thine eye!
The lovely cottage in the guardian nook
Hath stirred thee deeply; with its own dear brook,
Its own small pasture, almost its own sky!
But covet not the abode—O do not sigh
As many do repining while they look;
Intruders who would tear from Nature's book
This precious leaf with harsh impiety:
Think what the home would be if it were thine,
Even thine, though few thy wants! Roof, window door,
The very flowers are sacred to the poor.
The roses to the porch which they entwine:
Yea, all that now enchants thee, from the day
On which it should be touch'd would melt away!"

252—325. *ANALYSIS:—From the cottage he passes along a chestnut avenue, descends a gorge through which a brook runs, and mounting the opposite side, from "the alcove" views the wide landscape, the sheepfold, the hay carts, and the various foliage of the sylvan scene.*—STORR.

252-65. **PARAPHRASE**:—Close by, a long avenue of trees attracts us; it is a memorial of a bygone days,

now undeservedly despised. Our ancestors worthily esteemed such a shelter from the sun's glare and heat. and in their extensive arbours and shady paths, experienced at mid-day the cool shade of the evening. Now, having cut down our trees and thus deprived ourselves of their shade, we are obliged to carry our shades with us. We spread the flimsy umbrella, and roam over plains as bare of trees as American steppes. My thanks are due to Mr Throckmorton because for my sake he still allows these parallel rows of chestnut trees to grow, and although he himself is accomplished in all modern culture, he yet allows the old-fashioned avenues to remain.

252. **Colonnade** -The word comes through the French from Lat. *columna*, a column. It is transferred from architecture. So properly it denotes a series or range of columns placed at regular intervals. The pillars are here represented by the trunks of the trees, and the leaves and branches may be taken as the roof.

Length of colonnade This refers to two rows of chestnut trees in Throckmorton Park which was close to Weston-Underwood.

252-253. **A length of colonnade invites**—This is an instance of Pathetic Fallacy in which inanimate objects are credited with animal feelings.

253. **Monument** -Memorial; Nom. in apposition with *length*. The article '*a*' before *Monument* is omitted in defiance of rule, for the sake of the rhythm. [Note the difference between *rhyme* and *rhythm*; rhyme refers only to termination; but rhythm to the cadence of a whole line.]

On this matter of omitting the article, in one of his interesting letters (to Lady Hesketh, March 6th, 1786,) the poet says, "The perpetual use of it (the article) in our language is, to us miserable poets, attended with too great inconveniences. Our verse consisting only of ten syllables, it not infrequently happens that the fifth part of a line is to be engrossed, and necessarily too, unless elision prevents it, by this abominable intruder and, which is worse in my account, open vowels are continually the consequence. -The element,—The air, &c."

'Monument of ancient taste' -here. Poplar trees.

254. **Now scorn'd**, because taste and fashion have changed

A better fate, than being scorned

Our fathers knew the value of a screen 255
From sultry suns; and, in their shaded walks
And long protected bowers, enjoyed at noon
The gloom and coolness of declining day.
We bear our shades about us; self-deprived
Of other screen, the thin umbrella spread. 260

255. **Screen**, shelter.

256. **Sultry** Lit. sweltering: here, very hot.

257. **Long protected bowers**, bowers into which the sun does not penetrate during any portion of the day. Some editions have 'long protracted,' which would mean, stretching for a long distance.

Bowers.—A bower is now, as here, used for a shady place in a garden or pleasure-ground, sheltered from the sun by the branches of trees bent and brought together overhead; an arbour. The old meaning was a dwelling-place. Originally spelt *bowr*, from A. S. *bur*, a cottage, a place of retirement, *Fr.* '*buean* to inhabit, hence by 'a lady's bower' we mean her private room (opposed to '*hall*' which is a public chamber in a large house.

Noon.—This word has a curious history. With the Romans the hour of the principal meal was three o'clock. The day began at six; seven was the completion of the first hour, and three o'clock would therefore be the ninth hour *nono hora*. The expression noon (*nona*) has been adopted to signify the time of the principal meal, which, however, in early English days was not three but *twelve* o'clock.

258 **The gloom and coolness of declining day**– An exquisitely musical line illustrating Pope's canon, "The sound should be an echo of the sense."

259—61. **Self-deprived &c.** In full:—*We* self-deprived of other screen spread the thin umbrella, and *we* range an Indian waste &c.

And range an Indian waste without a tree.
Thanks to Benevolus, he spares me yet
These chesnuts range in corresponding lines;
And, though himself so polished, still reprieves
The obsolete prolixity of shade. 265
Descending now—but cautious, lest too fast—
A sudden steep, upon a rustic bridge,
We pass a gulf, in which the willows dip
Their pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink.
Hence, ankle-deep in moss and flowery thyme, 270

261. **An Indian waste**—Referring to the vast treeless plains of America, the aborigines of which were termed Indians.

262. **Benevolus**: A Lat. adjective, meaning well-wishing (*bene volo*, to wish), used here as a noun. This kind man was John Courtney Throckmorton, Esq., of Weston Underwood. He afterwards succeeded to the title of Sir John Throckmorton. This gentleman, on taking possession of the mansion at Weston, continued to Cowper the privilege of a key to admit him to the pleasure-grounds—a privilege which the poet had enjoyed for sometime. In a letter to Rev. W. Unwin, Cowper thus writes: "When this man succeeded to the estate on the death of his elder brother, and came to him at Weston, I sent him a complimentary card, requesting the continuance of that privilege, having till then enjoyed it by favour of his mother, who on that occasion went to finish her days at Bath. You may conclude that he granted it, and for about two years nothing more passed between us." Weston Hall, the seat of the Throckmortons, became afterwards a favourite haunt of Cowper, 'who found in it grace, kindness, books, and welcome.'

264-65. **The order is**—And *he* still reprieves the obsolete prolixity of shade, *though he* himself is so polished.

264. **Polished**. This was a title which the eighteenth century especially arrogated to itself. Thus Percy in the Preface to his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*: —"In a polished age like the present I am sensible that many of these reliques of antiquity will require great allowance to be made for them," &c. This "polish" was in many respects but a very meagre varnish.—HALES.

264-265 **EXPLANATION**:—Though he is cultivated and accomplished in all the newer graces, yet he retains the old-fashioned fondness for trees.

264-265. **PARAPHRASE**: -Though my friend has the advanced, fashionable tastes of the times when the 'shaded walks' of 'colonnades' are 'scorned,' he still allows the once valued 'screen from sultry suns' afforded by the chestnut trees to remain. And though he is himself a man of great polish and fashion, yet he allows the old-fashioned, long, shady avenue to remain.'

264. **Reprieves**—delays the execution of the sentence passed to cut them down. The word is usually employed of a respite after a criminal has been sentenced to death and is seldom used in any other connexion

265. **Obsolete**. Lat. *obsolesco, obsoletus*, to grow out of use. Gone out of use or fashion, antiquated, old-fashioned.

Prolixity—Is here used simply in the sense of *length*: from Lat. *prolixus*, lengthy: hence *prolixity* usually means 'the state of being prolonged to tediousness; it is commonly used of talking, narrative, &c. We speak of a prolix tale, or the prolixity of a description. Here the word is applied to the length or extent of the avenue. Again, the use of the substantive, prolixity instead of the adjective prolix, in agreement with, shade, is like that of the 'Winter Evening,' line 355. 'his pliant length of the whip' for 'his long and pliant whip.' *Prolixity* for *length* is a very farfetched and pedantic expression.

266-69. **PARAPHRASE**:—After carefully descending a steep incline, we cross, by means of a rustic bridge of rough hewn boughs, a stream in which the weeping willows steep their branches hanging as if athirst.

266. **But cautious**—But cautiously, for fear we should slip.

Lest too fast—In full: Lest *we descend* too fast for fear of stumbling.

266-67. Mr. Hugh Miller says:- Half way on we descend into the diagonal valley—"but cautious, lest too fast"—just where it enters the park from uplands, and find at its bottom "the rustic bridge."—It was rustic when at its best—an arch of some four feet span or so, built of undressed stones, fenced with no parapet, and covered overhead by a green breadth of turf: and it is now both rustic and ruinous to boot, for one half the arch has fallen in. The stream is a mere sluggish channel, much over-hung by hawthorn bushes; there are a good many half-grown oaks scattered about in the hallow, while on the other hand the old massy chestnuts top the acclivities.

267. The bridge spanned a brook, which after winding through the park, crossed the road leading from Olney to Northampton, at place called Overs-Bridge

268. **Willow**—The family of the willow contains many species and varieties; those best known are the Withy, or Creak Willow, the celebrated Weeping Willow. It is generally planted in landscape scenery, at the water's edge, near some romantic foot-path hedge, which it half conceals, or some glossy pool over which it hangs its streaming foliage "and dips its pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink." Cf. *Hamlet*, iv. 7:- "There is a willow grows ascant the brook." &c.

In full: Stooping as if *they stooped* to drink; or stooping—(*a*) as *they would stoop*—(*b*) if *they stooped* to drink. Here *as if* may be taken as a compound conjunction; or the two conjunctions can be shown by making two sentences. In analysing the two sentences, (*a*) is an adverbial sentence of manner to *stooping*, and (*b*) is a conditional sentence to *would stoop*.

269. **The pendant boughs, stooping as if to drink**—an instance of Pathetic Fallacy.

270. **Thyme**—a kind of half-shrubby plant noted for its sweet smell.

270—73. **PARAPHRASE**:—We then ascend the slope on the other side of the stream where as we walk, our feet sink up to the ankles in moss and flowering thyme, and we tread at intervals on the soft green mounds thrown up by the burrowing mole

We mount again, and feel at every step
Our foot half sunk in hillocks green and soft,
Raised by the mole, the miner of the soil.
He, not unlike the great ones of mankind,
Disfigures earth: and, plotting in the dark, 275
Toils much to earn a monumental pile,

374-77. **PARAPHRASE:**—Like many distinguished men, the mole deforms the earth, and, darkly scheming, labours hard to raise for himself a memorial column that may commemorate the injury he has done.

274. **Great ones of mankind** *i. e.* warriors whose conquests in former times were recorded on monuments of stone, &c.

275. **Plotting**—Forming a scheme of mischief: working.

In the dark, secretly, with reference to the men, but to be taken literally, with reference to the mole.

276. **Monumental**—Lat. *moneo*, to remind. Lit. of anything that reminds—here memorial.

Monumental Pile, a mausoleum, or monument built to commemorate their deeds.

That may record the mischiefs he has done.
The summit gained, behold the proud alcove
That crowns it! yet not all its pride secures
The grand retreat from injuries impressed 280
By rural carvers, who with knives deface
The panels, leaving an obscure, rude name,
In characters uncouth, and spelt amiss.
So strong the zeal to immortalise himself
Beats in the breast of man, that even a few, 285
Few transient years, won from the abyss abhorred

277. **Mischiefs**—Acts of mischief. This plural is hardly allowable; though in some instances, the plurals of abstract nouns can be used: plurals indicating not the qualities, but, as here, particular acts.

278-83. **PARAPHRASE**:—When we have reached the top of the hill we find the beautiful arbour on it. All its smartness, however, does not save the ornamental resting place from the destruction wrought by country fellows who disfigure its panels by clumsily carving on them their rude names which they cannot even spell correctly.

278. **The proud Alcove**—"Alcove," Spanish. *Alcoba*, a space in a room railed off to hold a bed of state: Arabic *Alcoba*, a cabinet or small chamber; a covered place with seats where one may rest and view the scene. A shady retreat or summer-house.

The Arabs overran Spain and the South of France in the seventh and eighth centuries. Hence the frequency of the Arabic article '*al*' in names of places in Spain.

Pope uses 'alcove' in its more general sense of any retired place:

"Cliveden's proud *alcove*,
The *bower* of wanton Shrewsbury and love."
—*Epistle to Lord Bathurst.*

279. **Crowns it**—Is on the top of it.

280. **From injuries.** Adverbial adjunct to *secures*.

282. **Panels.** *Panels* is a dim. of *pane*, from Lat. *pannus*. a piece of board inserted within a sort of frame, as in-doors, window-shutters, &c. ; a diminutive of *pane*.

Rude—common, vulgar, as Bill Hodge, Dick, &c.

283. **Characters.**—Letters.

Uncouth -Radically, unknown.

It now means unusual, strange, odd, unseemly, awkward, boorish, clumsy, A. S. *uncouth*, from *un*, not, *cud*, known, equivalent to *gecud*, past part. of *cunnan*, to know. *Uncouth* serves in Lowland Scotch *unco*. Like *uncouth*, *barbarous*, which formerly meant foreign, came to mean savage and wild. So *outlandish*, which in O. E. meant not belonging to the land, *i. e.* foreign, came to mean strange and awkward. This debased meaning arises from the disposition of mankind to dislike everything with which they are not acquainted. Cf.: (1) "The Greek and Latin languages are *uncouth* to the common people."

(2) "Find out some *uncouth* cell
Where brooding darkness spreads his jealous wings."

—MILTON, *L'Allegro*.

(3) "With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked."

—GRAY'S *Elegy*, *l* 79.

(4) "The hope of better that was *uncouth*."—SPENSER.

(5) "I go this *uncouth* errand."—CHELTON.

284—288. **EXPLANATION**:—So strong is the passion inherent in man's nature to perpetuate his memory, that a few fleeting years gained from the dreaded forgetfulness into which our names must pass, appear, even in the eyes of a rustic who it may be supposed has as little appreciation of fame as any mortal can have, a prize worth contending for. (i.e.) So great a desire to transmit his name to posterity animates the soul of man, that to be remembered for a few short years, seems a splendid thing even to a peasant.

This reflection was suggested to the poet by the names rudely carved on the panels of the alcove. Gray expresses the same sentiment in the Elegy:

> For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey, 85
>
> This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
>
> Left the warm precincts of cheerful day,
>
> Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?

286. **Transient**—Fleeting, rapidly passing away. *Transient* represents a thing as short at the best; *transitory* as liable at any moment to pass away. *Fleeting* goes further; and represents it as in the act of taking its flight. Life is *transient*; its joys are *transitory*; its hours are *fleeting*.

286. **Abyss**—Bottomless pit.

286. **The abyss abhorred**, of death.

Abyss of blank oblivion—Complete forgetfulness.

Of blank oblivion, seem a glorious prize,
And even to a clown. Now roves the eye;
And, posted on this speculative height,
Exults in its command. The sheepfold here 290
Pours out its fleecy tenants o'er the glebe.
At first, progressive as a stream, they seek
The middle field; but scattered by degrees,
Each to his choice, soon whiten all the land.

287. **A glorious prize**, prize well worth gaining.

288. **Even to a clown.** And that even to a clown (who it may be supposed, has as little appreciation of fame as any mortal can have) (*i.e.*) who might be expected to be indifferent to fame.

Clown—The word '*clown*' is contracted from Latin *colonus*, husbandman, from *colone*, to till. A husbandman, a rustic.

'Countryman,' 'peasant,' 'swain,' 'hind,' 'rustic,' 'churl,' are in meaning very similar words. 'Countryman' is one belonging to the country, as distinguished from the town, 'peasant,' has the same meaning, and is derived from a French root (*pays*): 'hind' and 'swain' are each equivalent to labourer; 'rustics' are born and bred in the *country*; '*churl*' describes etymologically the tenant...farmer of Anglo-Saxon times; as 'clown' describes the cultivator of the soil (*colonus*) and the early settler (colonist) in a new country. All these words, therefore, are closely allied. The first two however, it will be noticed, are in character indifferent. 'Swain' and 'hind' are nearly always used to designate rustic innocence; while 'churl' and 'clown' each implies the uncouth manners that too often distinguish *uncivilized* (i. e., country) life.

Roves the eye, the eye wanders from one object to another.

288-90. **EXPLANATION:**—The eye now wanders over the scene, and placed on this commanding height, rejoices in the greatness of its view.

289. **"The "speculative height"**—the height commanding a view. The use of the word 'speculative' as in this line has not established itself in the English language, and is therefore not to be imitated. The two principal meanings of the verb *to speculate* according to present usage—are (1) *to think or meditate* and (2) *to invest money in some commercial scheme where success is uncertain* Shakespeare uses the word '*speculation*' in the sense of intelligence. Macbeth, addressing Banquo's Ghost, says, "Thou hast no *speculation* in those eyes." He also calls the eyes *speculative* (*i. e.*, seeing) *instruments*.

290. **Exults**, revels, in the wide prospect

Command—Power and range of vision.

Here, in one direction.

290—94. **PARAPHRASE**—Here we see the sheep leaving the sheepfold—they proceed together in a body until they reach the middle of the meadow; but gradually dispersing each to the spot which it likes best, the face of the country is soon whitened over

291 **Glebe** Here grass-land; meadow. The word is derived through the Fr. from Lat *gleba*, land, soil, and is used for land generally. The land belonging to an ecclesiastical benefice is still called the *glebe*. Cf.: —

> (1) "Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield:
> Their furrow oft the stubborn *glebe* has broke"
> GRAY.
>
> (2) "Fertile of corn the *glebe*." MILTON.

292. **Progressive**, following one another in a continuous line

293. **The middle field**, a Latinism—the middle of the field.

There from the sunburnt hay-field homeward creeps [295
The loaded wain ; while lightened of its charge,
The wain that meets it passes swiftly by,
The boorish driver leaning o'er his team
Vociferous and impatient of delay.
Nor less attractive is the woodland scene, 300
Diversified with trees of every growth,
Alike, yet various. Here he gray smooth trunks

295.—299 **There...delay**- The cons. is: -The loaded wain creeps homeward there from sunburnt hay-field! while the wain (that meets it), lightened of its charge, passes swiftly by—the boorish driver, vociferous, and impatient of delay, leaning o'er his team.

295—299. **PARAPHRASE**—Elsewhere the heavily laden waggon may be seen going slowly homewards from the scorched hay-field while the returning empty waggon that meets runs quickly past, its driver brooking no delay, but bending over his horses and loudly urging them onward.

296. **Wain** Waggon ; O. E. *waegen*, *waen*. Both forms are found in English writers before the Conquest, and are still in use.

298. **Boorish**—Ger. *bauer* peasant. Compare 'pagan,' 'carl,' and 'churlish,' 'villain.' The epithet here seems to hover between its original and derived meaning.

The driver A nominative absolute.

299. **Vociferous** Shouting; lit., voice bearing; Lat. *vox vocis*, the voice, *fero*, to bear or carry.

300—306. **PARAPHRASE**—Not inferior in beauty is the sylvan scene variegated with trees of every age, similar in kind, though different in appearance. In one part the smooth grey stocks of the ash, the lime, or the beech glister in the dim light of their distant shadows.

In another part, the wood, concealed from view by the higher ground, seems as if sunk in the earth, only the highest branches of the trees being visible.

300–320. Compare with this description of "a woodland scene" one by Spenser, *Faerie Queen*, Book I. Canto i., Stanzas viii.—ix. Cowper paints the trees as he sees them. Spenser by the associations they suggest: Cowper is picturesque, Spenser literary. In the description of the oak they agree.

"The builder Oake sole king of forests all."

Compare with this Milton's "Monumental Oak" (Il Pens, l. 135).

300. **Nor** And not.

300–302. The order is: And the woodland scene diversified with trees of every growth, alike yet various is not less attractive.

301. **Every growth**—Every kind that grows, or, simply every kind.

302. **Alike yet or various**—*i. e.* alike in general appearance at a distance yet various in kind.

302–5. '*Here*,' '*There*' for '*in one place*;' '*in another*.'

302–8. The following is the analysis: The grey smooth trunks of ash or *of* lime or *of* beech | shine | here distinctly, within the twilight of their distant shade :||the wood, there lost behind a rising ground, seems sunk and shortened | to its topmost boughs *There* is no tree | in all the grove || *that* | has | *not* its charms ||, (though, each *has* | its hue peculiar||.

Of ash, or lime, or beech, distinctly shine,
Within the twilight of their distant shades ;

303. **Ash** : *The Ash* is one of the most useful of the British trees, on account of the excellence of its hard tough wood and the rapidity of growth.

Lime—*The Lime Tree* forms a very agreeable shade, and on this account is frequently used for planting public walks. The wood is soft, and excellent for carving.

The Beech *The Beech* is a very handsome tree. Its smooth white bark and its majestic growth distinguish it, even in winter, from all other trees. It grows to a height of 100 to 120 feet, and particularly when standing alone becomes a very ornamental tree with far-spreading branches, which often droop gracefully almost to the ground. The wood is hard and solid but brittle.

Distinctly shine, are clearly visible.

304. The *twilight* is caused by the shade under the trees.

Twilight Properly between light and dark (O. E. *twa twegen*, two, twain), *i. e.*, the faint light perceived before the rising or setting of the sun ; but here, the dim light of the wood.

Distant. though distant, the trees mentioned are distinctly discernible among the others.

Shades – The dark recesses of the wood.

Both *shade* and *shadow* are from O. E. *sceader* ; but shade differs from 'sha-dow' as it implies no definite form or limit, whereas a *shadow* represents in form the object which intercepts the light.

304. **The twilight of their distant shades**—The gloom cast by the shady branches. The *twilight* caused by the shade under the trees.

302-304. **PARAPHRASE** :– In one direction the glossy light coloured stems of the ash, lime or beech are clearly seen though at a distance, within the gloom cast by their own shade.

Q. Explain :—

"—Ash or lime or beech distinctly shine
Within the twilight of their distant shades."

There, lost behind a rising ground, the wood 305
Seems sunk, and shortened to its topmost boughs.
No tree in all the grove but has its charms,
Though each its hue peculiar ; paler some,
And of a wannish grey ; the willow such,
And poplar, that with silver lines his leaf, 310
And ash far stretching his umbrageous arm ;
Of deeper green the elm ; and deeper still,
Lord of the woods, and long-surviving oak.
Some glossy-leaved, and shining in the sun,

305. **Lost**—Hidden.
306. **Shortened &c.**—as the rising ground intervenes, only the topmost branches are visible.
307. **Its charms**—Its peculiar beauties.
308. **Peculiar**—of its own.
309. **Wannish**—Paler, somewhat wan or livid.
310. **With silver &c.** the leaf being lined with streaks of white.

311 **Far-stretching**—with long branches.
Umbrageous—Shady, forming a shade. Another instance of Cowper's fondness for Latin derivatives : from the same root comes the word umbrella.

313. **Long surviving oak** cf. Milton's "monumental oak" *Il Penseroso*, l. 135. Spenser's "Builder oak." The oak is famous for the great age to which it frequently attains and for the durability of its timber.

314-20. **PARAPHRASE.**—Some have smooth leaves that glitter in the sun, as the maple, the beech, fruitful in oily nuts, and the lime that sheds its fragrance at dewy eve, nor must we forget the sycamore so fanciful in its dress, being green during a part of the year, then becoming yellow, and before the woods have cast their leaves in autumn, assuming a bright red colour.

314. **Glossy-leaved**—Having leaves highly smooth.

The maple, and the beech of oily nuts 315
Prolific, and the lime at dewy eve
Diffusing odours ; nor unnoted pass
The sycamore, capricious in attire;
Now green, now tawny, and, ere autumn yet
Have changed the woods, in scarlet honours bright.
[320

315 **Maple**—The common Maple, a small tree, is a native of Britain, and of many parts of Europe and Asia. The wood is compact, fine-grained, takes a high polish, and is much used by turners, and for carved work.

Oily nuts—The fruit of the beech called beech mast, which supplies a useful oil.

Dewy eve -From *Par. Lost*, I. 743 :-
"From noon to *dewy eve*." &c

316. **Prolific**—productive of fruits.

318. **Sycamore**—the great maple. It changes the colour of its leaves as the season advances.

318. **Capricious**—Changeable : governed by caprice or whim.

319. **Capricious attire** changing in foliage.

Ere autumn yet—*i. e.* before autumn comes in and changes the aspect of the wood. *Have* is in the perfect subjunctive Mood after the conjunction 'ere.' In modern English, the verb is singular after 'ere.'

320. **In scarlet honours bright** -shining with bright scarlet leaves.

Honours—here, all the early autumn hues of the foliage.

O'er these, but far beyond (a spacious map
Of hill and valley interposed between),
The Ouse, dividing the well-watered land,
Now glitters in the sun, and now retires,
As bashful, yet impatient to be seen. 325
  Hence the declivity is sharp and short,

321-325 **PARAPHRASE**—Beyond a large expanse of uneven country, the Ouse, flowing through a well-irrigated district, at one point glistens in the sun-light and at another hides itself from view, as though shy and yet desirous of being seen.

321. **O'er** = beyond.
Map—expanse; landscape.

322. **Interposed**—(absolute construction.)

324. **Now glitters and now retires**—*At one time*, glitters, and *at another time*, retires, *i.e.*, passes out of view, owing to its very winding course.

325. **As bashful** *i.e.*, As if bashful. Here, the poet has before his mind's eye the picture of a coy maiden who, though sometimes fighting shy of the public gaze, is, in her feminine vanity, anxious to be seen and admired.

326-66. *ANALYSIS—Crossing another gulley, the poet enters the park, and passing beneath a second avenue, describes the effects of light and shade; thence through "the Wilderness" "to the Grove." He sees, through the foliage in the distance, threshers at work, and reflects on the sweet sleep of the labourer.*—Storr.

326-29. **EXPLANATION**—From this point there is a short rapid descent, and a little beyond, a steep ascending slope: between them flows a little streamlet which is almost dried up in the summer, but is filled again by the rains of the winter.

326. **Hence**—From this point; adverb expressing motion from.
Declivity—gradual descent.
Sharp—steep.

And such the re-ascent ; between them weeps
A litile Naiad her impoverish'd urn
All summer long, which winter fills again.
The folded gates would bar my progress now, 330
But that the lord of this enclosed demesne,

327. **Such**—Equally steep.
Re-ascent—*i. e.*, on the other side.

328. **Naiad**—(Greek *nao*, to flow) in Mythology, a water-nymph ; a goddess that presided over rivers and springs. A Naiad was usually represented as a beautiful female reclining against an urn from which a stream of water issued. Here, Naiad is a narrow channel that drains the hollow.

Impoverish'd urn—Her scanty supply of water.

Urn—is of course poetically and figuratively used for the supply of water, the Naiads being represented with urns.

328-329, **EXPLANATION**—Between the two ascents there is a streamlet which is almost dried up during the summer, but is replenished by the rains of the winter.

Q. Explain :—

" Between them weeps
A little Naiad her impoverish'd urn
All summer long, which winter fills again."

330-34. **PARAPHRASE**—Here, the closed gates of an adjoining estate would prevent me from proceeding further, were it not for the fact that the generous owner allows me to walk in his grounds. (And I do not abuse his kindness,) for the innocent eye does no injury, nor does it diminish the value of what affords it pleasure.

330. **Now,** at this point.

331. **But that**—were it not for the fact that. Cowper, here, refers to the kindness of Sir John Throckmorton (" Benevolus " of line 262).

Demesne—the manor and private grounds ; the modern word is *domain*.

Communicative of the good he owns,
Admits me to a share: the guiltless eye
Commits no wrong, nor wastes what it enjoys.
Refreshing change! where now the blazing sun? 335
By short transition we have lost his glare,
And stepped at once into a cooler clime.

332. **Communicative**—willing to share.

Owns—possesses.

333. **Share**—of the enjoyment of the grounds, by lending the key. "Ste Beuve aptly contrasts Cowper and Rousseau. Rousseau would, doubtless, have refused to enter the park, and gone all the way round in the sun, rather than be beholden for anything to the rich and powerful"—*Storr*.

Guiltless—Harmless; the eye being incapable of doing injury, as compared with hands and feet.

333-334. **EXPLANATION**—A beautiful prospect is none the worse for being looked at.

335-37. **EXPLANATION**—And when we enter the demesne, what a pleasant change do we perceive! We, no longer, feel the scorching sun. By a short walk, we pass out of the sun's glaring rays into the cool shade.

335. **Refreshing &c.**—what a delightful change from the glare outside to the shade of the trees inside!

Where now?—what has become of?

336. **By short transition** *i.e.*, by merely stepping inside and under the trees.

Transition—literally, a passing from one place to another; going over.

Glare—dazzling glow.

337. **Clime**—temperature; region; place.

Ye fallen avenues! once more I mourn
Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice
That yet a remnant of your race survives. 340
How airy and how light the graceful arch,
Yet awful as the consecrated roof
Re-echoing pious anthems! while beneath,
The chequered earth seems restless as a flood

338-40. **PARAPHRASE**—Again I lament the undeserved destruction of those old shady walks of trees, and again I rejoice that still a few of them remain.

338. **Ye fallen avenues**—This is addressed generally to those rows of trees which, by the taste or fashion of the time, were cut down. The trees at Weston were *not* cut down, but they formed the '*remnant*' of line 340.

Once more, as I have already done in lines 252-260.

341. **The graceful arch**—formed by the tops of the trees, on either side of the avenue, meeting overhead.

342. **Awful**—Awe-inspiring by its solemn sublimity.

Consecrated roof &c.—roof of a church, or cathedral. The inside view of a cathedral is, of course, meant. A faint echo of Milton's *Il Penseroso*, ll. 157-163.

"Gothic architecture, with its aspiring tendency, its grove-like range of clustered columns and rich foliated ornaments, seems clearly borrowed from the vegetable world"—Storr.

In the *Spectator*, No. 50, Addison in the "Four Indian Kings" thus describes the arches of St. Paul's Cathedral:—"In several places, hewn out into pillars that stand like the trunks of so many trees bound about the top with garlands of leaves."

343. **Pious Anthems**—Sacred songs.

344. **Chequer'd earth**—The ground under the trees, diversified by light and shadow.

Chequer'd—varied with alternate light and shade Cf.:—

"To many a youth and many a maid
Dancing in the chequere'd shade."—*L'Allegro*, l. 95.

Brushed by the wind. (So sportive is the light 345
Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,
Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,
And darkening and enlightening, as the leaves
Play wanton, every moment, every spot.)

341-345. **PARAPHRASE**—With what a light and lofty curve the branches meet above, and yet they inspire the same kind of reverential feeling as we experience in a vast cathedral in which solemn anthems are sung, while the ground dotted with alternate sunlight and shade seems to quiver like a stream touched by the breeze.

345. **Brush'd**—Agitated

346. **Shot**—Darted.

Sportive—Playful.

It dances—Supply *that*; The light dances in unison with the movement of the boughs.

347. **Intermingling quick.**—Interchanging in rapid succession, owing to the singular "dance" of the boughs and the "wanton play" of the leaves in the sunshine.

347-48. **Shadow &c.**—Nom. absolute.

349. **Wanton**—(adv) capriciously

Every moment—Is adv. object to the two participles, "darkening" and "enlighetning," and *spot* is object to them.

345-349. **Paraphrase**—The light wich darts between the branches seems to move in playful unison with them with an instantaneous succession of sun and shade, clouding and brightening every instant, each spot of ground through the capricious and uncertain motion of the leaves.

And now, with nerves new-braced and spirits
[cheered, 350
We tread the wilderness, whose well-rolled walks,
With curvature of slow and easy sweep—
Deception innocent—give ample space
To narrow bounds. The grove receives us next;
Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms 355
We may discern the thresher at his task.

350-354. **PARAPHRASE**—Then with minds refreshed and strength renewed, we enter the artificial wilderness, where the smooth well-kept paths, winding in gentle curves, and thus causing us to think the small enclosure more extensive than it is, produce a harmless deception.

350. **New braced**—invigorated by the cooling of the colonnade of trees.

351 **Wilderness**—is a wood, grown full of underwood through which winding walks are cut in all directions.

352. **Curvature &c.**—The walks are curved, but the curvature is so gentle that one scarcely observes it. The effect is to increase the apparent extent of the grounds. This, as Cowper says, is deception, but a harmless one.

353. **Deception innocent**—An interjectional phrase. The winding character of the walks adds to their length, and thus makes the 'Wilderness' appear more extensive than it really is.

354-56. **The grove...task.**—Leaving the wilderness, we next enter a plantation of elms, and, as we look between the straight trunks of the lofty trees, we see the thresher at his work.

354. **Grove**—This differs from the 'Wilderness' (351) in being free from underwood; cluster of trees.

356. **Thresher**=one who threshes grain.

Thump after thump resounds the constant flail,
That seems to swing uncertain, and yet falls
Full on the destined ear. Wide flies the chaff:
The rustling straw sends up a frequent mist 360
Of atoms, sparkling in the noon day beam.
Come hither, ye that press your beds of down

357 **Thump after thump** one blow succeeding another.

Flail—An instrument for beating grain from the ear by hand.

359. **Full**—Unerringly,

358—59. **PARAPHRASE**—The flail as it moves, through the air, looks as if it is under no guidance, yet falls exactly on the ear of corn on which it is meant to fall.

359. **Destined ear**—The ears of corn on which the thresher intends the flail to fall.

Wide—in every direction.

Chaff—husks of the grain.

360. **Frequent**—thick: close.

361. **Atoms**—portions of matter so small that they cannot be cut.

163. **And sleep not**—and enjoy no sleep, though you lie on beds of down.

362-66. **PARAPHRASE**—You who cannot get sleep, even on the softest down, take a lesson from this thresher, earning his bread by hard manual labour, and, in the very working out of the primeval curse, converting it into health, beauty and fertility. Come here, you who cannot sleep even on beds of down, come and see the thresher, toiling hard for his bread before he eats it. That man should toil for his food was the primal curse, pronounced upon him by God, but it has since been made a blessing to him, for, by assiduous labour, his days are spent cheerfully, and his nights, in sound repose.

And sleep not; see him sweating o'er his bread
Before he eats it.—'Tis the primal curse,
But softend into mercy; made the pledge 365
Of cheerful days, and nights without a groan.

363-364 Cf. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake—In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"—*Gen.* iii. 17 and 19.

364. An ancient poet (Ste. Beuve remarks) would have stopped at v. 361. but Cowper is profoundly Christian: even amid "Places of nestling green for poets made" he hears the primeval curse pronounced, and reflects on the fall of man.—Storr.

364-65. **'Tis the Primal curse**—The first curse delivered on Adam and his descendants.

"In the sweat of they face shalt thou eat bread—" (Genesis III. 19.)

365. **Softened into mercy**—In that the labourer sweating for his bread, lives cheerfully during the day and sleeps soundly at night. Converted into a blessing.

Cf. "But softened all. and tempered into beauty."—Byron.

Explain:

......'Ts the primal curse,
But softened into mercy.

Pledge—token of promise

366. "**Without a groan**—A reference to the peaceful sleep which follows days of toil. Cf. "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet whether he eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep."—*Eccl.* v. 12.

"Why rather, Sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
And hush'd with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
Under the canopies of costly state,
And lull'd with sounds of sweetest melody?"

—Shakespeare, 2 *King Henry* IV, Act. III.

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By ceaseless action all that is subsists.
Constant rotation of the unwearied wheel,
That Nature rides upon, maintains her health,
Her beauty, her fertility. She dreads 370
An instant's pause, and lives but while she moves.
Its own revolvency upholds the world.

367. **Ceaseless action**—constant motion or energy.

All that is all that exists: the universe.

Subsists Retains its present state or condition.

367-408. *ANALYSIS—As nature lives by the law of constant change, so, by change, man's powers are kept in health and activity Storr.*

367-70. **PARAPHRASE**—Whatever exists only does so by incessant motion. The constant change which nature effects keeps the earth healthy, beauteous and fruitful.

367-72. **Explanation**—Change and motion seem absolutely necessary for the preservation of the universe. The earth *rotates* on its axis, and *revolves* round the sun, producing day and night and all that variety of seasons' which is indispensably necessary for the beauty and fertility of the earth. But besides this *constant rotation* and *revolution* of the earth itself, there is *ceaseless action* on the surface of the earth—in the ocean. The face of the earth is for ever renewed, altered, and reformed; and the ocean and the atmosphere are in constant circulation; water, for instance, rises as vapour from the ocean, assumes the form of cloud, descends on land in various forms *viz.* rain, hail, snow, and dew; and, then, collecting, in larger currents, seeks the ocean again, in order to undergo, again, the same series of changes. "Thus the land depends upon the ocean, and the ocean on the land; the clouds, on the earth, and the earth, on the clouds; the rivers on the seas, and the seas, on the rivers; and "All are but parts of one stupendous whole." This constant circulation and ceaseless interchange is essential to organic health, as the circulation

of the blood to animal existence ; and were it once to cease, nature would be paralysed, and everything that has life would perish.

368-69. **The wheel that Nature rides upon**—entirely figurative. [The constant change, which over-working nature effects, keeps the world and all things in it, in health, beauty and fertility.]

368. **Rotation**—change of form, *e. g.* the strength of the earth is drawn up into the tree in the form of sap.

The unwearied wheel &c.—the constant changes in nature. "A wheel is the symbol of endless motion.

'Look Nature through,'tis revolution all'.

Young's Night Thoughts.

But the simile, here, is not a very happy one, for Nature is herself the wheel"—*Storr.*

370. **She**—Nature.

370-72. **PARAPHRASE**—Nature fears to take rest even for a moment, for the instant she ceases to move, she also ceases to exist. The world itself maintains its position by its never-ceasing motion.

372. **Revolvency**—tendency to revolve, or capability of revolving : a very rare word of Cowper's coinage

Its refers to *world*

Winds from all quarters agitate the air,
And fit the limpid elements for use,
Else noxious ; oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams, [375
All feel the freshening impulse, and are cleansed
By restless undulation : even the oak
Thrives by the rude concussion of the storm ;
He seems indeed indignant, and to feel

373-82. **PARAPHRASE.**—The atmosphere is kept in continual circulation by winds blowing in all directions, and it is thus purified, and rendered fit for use, whereas, if it were not thus agitated, it would be injurious. Oceans, rivers, lakes and streams are all acted on by the same vivifying power, and purified by constant motion : even, the oak, is strengthened by the violence of the storm ; he is so strong that he seems to treat the tempestuous wind with scorn, menacing his assailant like some thunder-wielding God.

373. **Agitate**—move, circulate.

374. **Limpid element**—air, *not* water, which is mentioned afterwards.

375. **Else nexious**—the air would become poisonous, if it were not circulated.

376. **The freshening impulse**—*i. e.* of the wind—the force that causes motion, and, so, imparts new life to them.

377. **Undulation**—movement of the water into waves.
378. **Concussion**—shaking.

379-82. **'He seems...thunder'**—Ths is very figurative. The oak is so little bent or affected in a storm, that, were it animated, would seem to be indignant at the attack of the blast, and, to feel contempt for the storm's puny efforts, conscious that, at its will, it could overpower the storm by its own superior might.

379. **He**—*i.e.* the oak. He seems to feel the blow of the storm disdainfully, as it can do no harm to his boughs.

To feel indignant—at the attack of the blast.

The impression of the blast with proud disdain 380
Frowning, as if in his unconscious arm
He held the thunder (but the monarch owes
His firm stability to what he scorns—
More fixed below, the more disturbed above.

381. **Frowning &c**—The meaning seems to be, 'The oak frowns, as he would have frowned if he carried the thunder in his arm. Virtually, he carries the thunder in his arm, but is unconscious of the fact'. Cf. Campbell,

" *With thunders from her native oak*
She quells the floods below "

—*Ye Mariners of England*,

381. **Frowning &c.**—The personification, contained in these lines is suggested by Classical mythology which represents the oak as sacred to Jupiter, and, generally, depicts that god sitting upon a golden or ivory throne, holding in one hand thunderbolts, just ready to be hurled, and in the other, a sceptre of cypress.

382. **Monarch**—The oak, generally, called the king of trees. " Lord of the woods, the long-surviving oak "—line 313.

383. **What he scorns**—*i.e.* the blast.

384. **More fixed**—Supply *the* in the beginning of the line. The more he is disturbed above, the more is he fixed below.

382-84. **PARAPHRASE**—But the firmness of the oak is owing to what he thus disdains, *viz.* the blast; for, the more he is shaken by the wind, the more strongly does he root himself in the earth.

The law, by which all creatures else are bound, 385
Binds man, the lord of all. Himself derives
No mean advantage from a kindred cause,
From strenuous toil his hours of sweetest ease.
The sedentary stretch their lazy length
When custom bids, but no refreshment find, 390

385-88. **The law...sweetest ease**—And the rule which holds good for all other created beings is true respecting man, the noblest of God's creation. He too derives benefit from a similar source: for, from patient labour springs his pleasantest repose.

385. **The law**—*i.e.* of ceaseless action, l. 366.

Creatures—Things created—now generally used only of animated beings.

385. **Else** = *other*; here, an adjective.

386. **Himself derives, &c.**—That is—just as other things derive benefit from motion, so does man, he gaining his sweetest rest as a recompense for severe exercise.

387. **No mean** = great.

Kindred—analogous.

388. **Strenuous**—eager, persevering.

389. **The sedentary**—those who take no exercise.

390. **When custom bids**—at the usual hour.

For none they need: the languid eye, the cheek
Deserted of its bloom, the flaccid, shrunk,
And withered muscle, and the vapid soul,
Reproach their owner with that love of rest
To which he forfeits even the rest he loves. 395
Not such the alert and active. Measure life

391. **For none they need**—the sedentary people, taking little physical exercise, require little rest for they are not tired. They "stretch their lazy length" only through habit, and not because they are fatigued with any strenuous exertion.

Languid—heavy, spiritless.

392. **Flaccid**—Flabby; yielding to pressure for want of firmness; soft and weak.

393. **Vapid**—without spirit: flat; joyless, taking no interest in anything.

394-95. **PARAPHRASE**—Shew that he to whom they belong is a slave to indolent repose, by indulging in which he misses that real rest he so desires (a thing to be obtained only by work).

394-395. **Reproach their owner &c.**—are a standing reproof, for they are always a present evidence of his lazy habits.

396-98. **PARAPHRASE**—Such is not the case with the brisk and energetic man. If we estimate life by the real enjoyment it gives, then, the life of the active man alone deserves the name. The comforts life gives, are its true worth; judged by that standard, the life of the alert and active alone, seems to be worthy of the name of life. Why? Because they possess good health.

The name—*i. e.* of life.

396. **Measure**—'if you measure', the Imperative Mood is used for the Subjunctive.

By its true worth, the comforts it affords,
And theirs alone seems worthy of the name.
Good health and its associate in the most,
Good temper : spirits prompt to undertake, 400
And not soon spent, though in an arduous task ;
The powers of fancy and strong thought are theirs;

397. **True worth**—The real estimate of the value of life and the comfort we derive from it.

The comforts it affords—is appositional to 'True worth.'

398. **And theirs alone, &c.**—and = 'and the result will be that.'

399. **Its associate**—*i.e.* its usual accompaniment.

In the most—In the case of most people.

Spirits prompt—ready to begin a task.

401. **Spent**—exhausted, fatigued.

In = engaged in.

402. **Strong thought**—vigorous intellect.

399-402. The words *health*, *temper*, *spirits*, *powers*, *thought* are each in the nominative case, and form, with their enlargements, the subject of *are theirs*.

399-404. **PARAPHRASE**—They are healthy and usually good tempered; they begin their work early and they are not soon wearied with it, though it be difficult; their imagination is vivid, and intellect vigorous; even when they grow old they seem to be distinctly free from the evils which commonly attend old age.

E'en age itself seems privileged in them
With clear exemption from its own defects.
A sparkling eye beneth a wrinkled front 405
The veteran shows, and, gracing a gray beard
With youthful smiles, descends toward the grave
Sprightly, and old almost without decay.

403. **Privileged, &c.** —granted an immunity (freedom) from.

The passage means: many active people, when they grow old, are exempted from the evils flesh is usually heir to in old age.

405-408. **PARAPHRASE**—Under his furrowed brow shine clear bright eyes, and though his beard is grey, his smile is cheerful; and he dies, old indeed, but still retaining the liveliness of his youth and with powers almost unimpaired.

405. **A sparkling eye &c.**—the face has been wrinkled with age, but the eye has not lost its youthful lustre.

407. **Descend &c.**—dies full of the vigour of youth: the body as well as the senses showing no visible decay.

Like a coy maiden, Ease, when courted most
Farthest retires—an idol, at whose shrine 410
Who oftenest sacrifice are favoured least.
The love of Nature and the scenes she draws

409–454. *ANALYSIS—The secret of happiness is not to seek happiness. Nature suffices for happiness. How perverse are those who prefer the town and art to the country and Nature. I admire pictures as showing me foreign scenes I cannot hope to visit myself, but Nature is superior to any picture. Nature pleases all our senses, a picture, only one ; a picture is for the privileged few, Nature is free for all. A forced absence from natural scenes reveals their true worth, as in the case of the prisoner, the invalid, or the sailor.*—Storr.

409-11. **PARAPHRASE**—Ease is, like a coy maiden, most chary of her presence when she is most eagerly sought after—She is a goddess who favours least those who wait on her most.

409. **Coy**—Shy. Fr. Coi.

411. **Who**—those who; a Latinism.

412-19. **PARAPHRASE**—In order that a man may enjoy true ease, it is necessary that he should love nature and natural scenery. It is wonderful that there should exist persons who shut themselves up in their splendid mansions, and prefer the scentless productions of the loom (*i e.*, carpets, tapestry, &c.) to the fragrance of the open air; who, contented with mere painted representations of nature's scenes, are better pleased with the less wondrous productions of the artist than with the works of God.

412. **Scenes**—Gr. *Skene*, a tent, covered place, or stage on which a play is exhibited. Then such a spectacle itself, afterwards extended to include *natural* scenes.

Is Nature's dictate. Strange! there should be [found,
Who, self-imprison'd in their proud saloons,
Renounce the odours of the open field 415
For the unscented fictions of the loom;
Who, satisfied with only pencilled scenes,
Prefer to the performance of a God
The inferior wonders of an artist's hand!
Lovely indeed the mimic works of Art; 420

413. **Is Nature's dictate**—It is natural for man to love natural scenery.

There, as here used, has no adverbial force, but the effect merely of allowing the nom. and the verb to be transposed.

412-13. **The love of Nature, &c.**—Nature herself commands us to love Nature and the sights of nature. *Nature* = the world of phenomena as a whole: the outward forms of things unmodified by man.

Dictate—Command.

414. **Who**—A Latin idiom = *some* (or, *those*) relative; the antecedent is "persons" understood.

Self-imprison'd, &c.—Choosing to confine themselves to the interior of their palatial buildings.

Proud—Grand, magnificent. The idea is one of transference. It is, of course, the people owning the saloons who are, in the ordinary sense, proud, but the epithet is transferred from the owner to the possession.

Saloons—Halls. This word, in England, is now very much confined to the public apartments in a steamer, or to large public refreshment-rooms. We scarcely speak of the saloons of a private house, though the word appears to be used in that way in America.

415-16. **Renounce...loom**—Neglect the fragrance of the flowers which grow on the open field for the scentless flowers woven of the loom.

416. **Fiction of the loom**—Flowers worked in embroidery or tapestry. A fiction is anything feigned, pretended, or imitated. Lat. *fingo*, to form, feign. The word is usually applied to that which is feigned in the mind, as a story.

In carpets, chairs, curtains, and sofa covers, &c., are often represented bits of scenery; and the poet upbraids those who can prefer these 'unscented fictions' to the real fields with their health-giving fragrance.

415-416. **Renounce, &c.**—Neglect the fragrance of the flowers which grow in the open field for the scentless flowers woven of the loom.

Fictions—L. *fingo, fictum*, to feign, fashion.

Loom—Fabrics produced by the loom.

417-27. "Art is human, Nature is divine; therefore, Nature must be better and greater than art."

417. **Pencilled scenes**—Pictures; sketches drawn with the pencil.

418. **A God**—The use of the indefinite article here requires explanation. It does not of course mean that there is more than one God, but the expression may be considered equal to 'such a being as we conceive God to be.' The performance of a God is of course the work of Nature.

Inferior—To those of Nature, *i.e.*, of God.

420-27. **PARAPHRASE**—The imitations of the artist are certainly beautiful, but the works of Nature are much more so. No one esteems more highly than I do the wonderful power of the painter who, in his pictures, shows me things that I may never see, who transfers the scenes of other countries into mine, and, as it were, reflects Italian light from the walls of English rooms. But the works of the painter are pleasing to the sight only, while Nature gratifies all our senses.

420. **'Mimic works of Art'**—Works of art which imitate Nature. In the word *mimic* something of the droll or ludicrons is often implied; but not so here, where it is equivalent to *imitative* of l. 426.

420. **Indeed**—Is a concessive adverb=I admit.

Mimic—Imitative.

But Nature's works far lovelier. I admire,
None more admires, the painter's magic skill,
Who shows me that which I shall never see,
Conveys a distant country into mine,
And throws Italian light on English walls. 425
But imitative strokes can do no more
Than please the eye—sweet Nature every sense.
The air salubrious of her lofty hills,
The cheering fragrance of her dewy vales,
And music of her woods—no works of man 430

422. **None more admires**—I yield to nobody in my admiration of.

Magic -Marvellous in its effects.

424. By painting foreign scenes such as pictures that are hung on the walls of English rooms.

424. **Conveys, &c.**—By representing it in painting.

425. **'Italian light'**—The reference, here, is to the great Italian painters, whose works are the masterpieces of art.

425. **And throws, &c.**—In the representation of Italian landscapes we see, though we remain in England, the effect of sunshine in a Southern country.

426-27. The greater part of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* might have been written as a refutation of these lines. Painting is a language, but as language, only valuable as a vehicle of thought.—STORR.

"Sweet Nature *pleases* every sense."—MORELL. The poet is wrong here; for man's 'imitative works' may do a great deal more than merely 'please the eye.'

427. **Sweet Nature every sense**—Sweet nature (pleases) every sense. A painted tree can delight only our organ of vision, but a tree in nature pleases our eyes with the sight, our ears with the music, the birds make on it, our sense of smelling with the fragrance of its flowers, &c.

The poet's chain of thought seems to be this: 'Art is human, Nature is divine; therefore, Nature is superior to art.' The truth rather seems to be that each has a value of its own. Nature is ever changing, and Art preserves Nature. The poet himself admits this in the lines—

> "Blest be the art that can immortalize,
> The art that baffles Time's tyrannic claim,"
>
> *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture.*

428-35. **PARAPHRASE**—No productions of the artist can emulate the pure health-giving breeze of the mountains, the delightful odours of the dew-besprinkled valleys, or the melodious sounds of the woods; these are the results of a power belonging exclusively to Nature. She offers them daily; *they* justly forfeit such joys, who, staying at home, disdain to partake of them.

428. **Salubrious**—healthy; bracing. (L. *Salues*, health.)

429. **Cheering**—Refreshing.

Fragrance—from flowers and trees.

429. **Dewy vales**—*i. e.*, in the morning, and evening.

430. **Music of her woods**—The songs of birds.

May rival these; these all bespeak a power
Peculiar, and exclusively her own.
Beneath the open sky she spreads the feast;
'Tis free to all—'tis every day renewed;
Who scorns it starves deservedly at home. 435
He does not scorn it, who imprisoned long
In some unwholesome dungeon, and a prey
To sallow sickness, which the vapours, dank

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431. **Bespeak**—Indicate.

432. **Peculiar**—Proper to, and specially belonging to Nature. *Peculium* meant property in cattle *(pecus)*, and as property generally was represented by cattle, the word meant, generally, property which was private and *proper* (belonging) to each man.

Exclusively, &c.—Shared with no one else.

433. **The feast**—The beauties and bounties of Nature.

435. **Who**—Relative; understood, he.

Starves—Passes his life undelighted by Nature's beauties.

Starves deservedly—Goes without the feast of the senses, and he merits this.

437. **Dungeon**—The donjon was the innermost tower or *keep* of a castle.

Dank—Moist, damp

438. **Sallow sickness**—Is that disease in which the skin becomes of a pale yellowish colour, (for want of pure blood.

438. **Sallow**—Yellow coloured; unhealthy looking. The epithet is transferred from the sick man to the sickness which is the cause of the sallowness.

And clammy, of his dark abode have bred,
Escapes at last to liberty and light : 440
His cheek recovers soon its healthful hue ;
His eye relumines its extinguished fires ;
He walks, he leaps, he runs—is winged with joy,
And riots in the sweets of every breeze.

439. **Clammy**—Wet and sticky.

441. **Recover**—To get back again, Lat. *recuherare*, from *re* back and *cohere* to take.

442. **Relumines**—Lights again.

443. **PARAPHRASE**—A fine expression; indeed all this description is very graphic. He is so joyful that he seems almost to fly over the ground, and revels in the perfume-loaded sweet breeze.

443. **He walks, etc.**—Notice that every succeeding action is more strongly indicative of the escaped prisoner's joy than the preceding one. He walks, nay more, he leaps, yea, positively runs—aye, actually seems to fly with joy. This is called a climax. Ignorance of a language, sometimes, results in an anti-climax, as in the case of the Frenchman describing London, 'It is magnificent. It is superb! It is pretty well!' 'Pretty well' was intended as a climax, *i.e.*, as a stronger expression than the two preceding adjectives, but is in reality a much feebler expression of approval than either "magnificent" or "superb."

443 **Is winged with joy**—Flies in the ecstacy of joy, he feels at the time.

444. **Riots**—Indulges in excess; revels.

Sweets—Sweet odours.

He does not scorn it, who has long endured 445
A fever's agonies, and fed on drugs.
Nor yet the mariner, his blood inflamed
With acrid salts ; his very heart athirst
To gaze at Nature in her green array.
Upon the ship's tall side he stands, possessed 450
With visions prompted by intense desire :
Fair fields appear below, such as he left

445-54. **PARAPHRASE**—Equally dear is it to him who has long suffered the violent pangs of fever, who instead of food, has practically lived on medicine, and to the sailor whose blood is heated with inflaming salts, while his very soul longs to gaze on the verdant scenes of Nature. As he stands on the lofty bulwark of the ship his mind, filled with fancies, excited by his vehement desire, he imagines beautiful green fields, like those of his native country, and such as he would die to see again, to be lying around him. He plunges headlong, and sinks, and is seen no more.

445-446. These two lines tell of the *invalid*, confined to bed through illness.

447. **Yet**—Even.

448. **Acrid**—Biting to the taste. L. *acris*, sharp.

450-451. **Possessed with visions, etc.**—Cowper here describes a mariner suffering from a calenture, a temporary delirium or fever (Spanish *calentura*) prevalent in hot climates, and fancying in his delirium that he sees fields in the sea.—*Chamber's Edition*.

Far distant, such as he would die to find,—
He seeks them headlong, and is seen no more.
The spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns; [455
The lowering eye, the petulance, the frown,
And sullen sadness, that o'ershade, distort,
And mar the face of beauty, when no cause
For such immeasurable woe appears,
These Flora banishes, and gives the fair 460

454. **Seeks them headlong**—Plunges into the waters to get to them.

Wordsworth has a parallel description in his poem of *The Brothers*, and tells of a similar mariner who was a shepherd in his boyhood. Wordsworth's mariner, however, does not plunge into the sea and he is perhaps more true to life,

> He, thus, by feverish passion overcome,
> Even with the organ of his bodily eye,
> Below him, in the bosom of the deep
> Saw mountains; saw the forms of sheep that grazed
> On verdant hills—with dwellings among trees,
> And shepherds clad in the same country grey
> Which he himself had worn."

455-61. **PARAPHRASE**—People are seldom troubled with ill humour, while walking in the fields. A rural life dispels the clouded look, the peevish temper, the angry scowl, and the gloomy melancholy that darken and deform the face, and deprive it of its beauty more lasting than that of fruits or flowers.

The idea of the poet in these lines is, that melancholy cannot be indulged in in the presence of flowers and fruits, in their endless variety. The contemplation of these exerts upon the mind a cheering, and, consequently, a healthful influence.

Sweet smiles, and bloomless transient than her
[own.

It is the constant revolution, stale
And tasteless, of the same repeated joys,
That palls and satiates, and makes languid life
A pedlar's pack, that bows the bearer down. 465
Health suffers, and the spirits ebb ; the heart
Recoils from its own choice—at the full feast
Is famished—finds no music in the song,

462-65. **PARAPHRASE**—Continual indulgence in pleasures which have been repeated until they please no more, cloys the senses, and makes dull life as burdensome as a hawker's pack, the bearer of which bends beneath its weight.

466-71. **PARAPHRASE**—By constant indulgence in pleasures, the health is injured ; spirits droop ; the mind draws back, in disgust, from what once pleased it most ; among all its former joys it finds no pleasure ; it perceives no melody in the song, no wit in the joke, and it knows not the cause of such a change. Yet thousands, though tired and weary of life, would still live on, to the end.

467. **Recoils from, etc.**—Is repelled from what it had previously derived.

At the full feast, etc.—Because the feast cannot be enjoyed for want of proper appetite.

468. **Finds no music**—Another illustration of the discontented spirit which nothing pleases.

No smartness in the jest; and wonders why.
Yet thousands still desire to journey on, 470
Though halt, and weary of the path they tread.
The paralytic, who can hold her cards,
But cannot play them, borrows a friend's hand
To deal and shuffle, to divide and sort

469. **And wonders why**—And finds it strange that those things the heart loveth best should fail to please it; is puzzled in accounting for its own dissatisfied condition.

470. **Yet**—Notwithstanding this *ennui*.

To journey on—To continue to live.

471. **Halt**—literally lame; here, unable to enjoy life.

472-77. **PARAPHRASE**—The wretched paralytic dame who is just able to hold the cards in her hand, but cannot play them, gets a friend to shuffle, and deal the cards for her, to separate and arrange those she holds, and play them for her, while she herself, a poor helpless creature, sits silently observing the game, and forming at the same time a pitiable object of observation to the rest.

472. **Paralytic**—One stricken with palsy.

474. **Deal**—To divide the cards among the players.

Shuffle—To mix the cards up in such a way that they shall not be dealt again in the same order.

Her mingled suits and sequences, and sits 475
Spectatress both and spectacle, a sad
And silent cipher, while her proxy plays.
Others are dragg'd into the crowded room
Between supporters; and once seated, sit
Through downright inability to rise, 480

475. **Suits**—Sets of the same kind of cards. The four suits are *hearts*, *spades*, *clubs* and *diamonds*.

Sequences—Three or more cards of the same suit in immediately consecutive order of value; as *ace* king, queen; or eight, nine, ten, knave.

Sits spectatress, etc.—Notice the *alliteration* beginning in "suits" and ending with "plays" in 1. 477. She looks on all the game, but is herself, from the obstinacy with which she clings to her beloved game, a spectacle, or object worthy of admiration.

Q—Explain :—

Spectatress both and spectacle

477. **Cipher**—A figure of nought; a nullity.

Proxy—Abbreviated form of *procuracy*—one who acts for another.

479. **Supporters**—Persons leading or supporting them.

480. **Downright**—Absolute.

Till the stout bearers lift the corpse again.
These speak a loud memento. Yet ev'n these
Themselves love life, and cling to it as he
That overhangs a torrent, to a twig.
They love it, and yet loathe it ; fear to die, 485
Yet scorn the purposes for which they live.

481. **Corpse**--(L. *corpus* body, alive or dead) the inert body of the person carried.

482-90. **PARAPHRASE**—These are a sad proof of the effects of dissipation. Yet even these are most anxious to clutch, and preserve their lives : they stick to life as drowning men catch at straws to save them from the waters. Although they desire so much to live, they find no pleasure in the life they lead ; they are afraid to die yet they despise the follies, to which they devote their lives. Then, why do they not forsake them ? Because they have a cowardly fear of being alone, which might cause them to reflect on their past lives, and trouble them with remorse, also, because they fear the ridicule of their companions, and, lastly, because they cannot lay aside long continued habits. .

482. **PARAPHRASE**—The sad state of these is plain evidence of the evils of long and excessive indulgence in senses and dissipation and is another warning to a man.

482. **Memento**—A warning ; any hint or suggestion to awaken memory and serve as a warning.' Memento Mori = remember death.

484. **That overhangs me** —Cf. "drowning man clings to straw."

485. **They love it**—And so 'fear to die.'

They loathe it—Are sick or tired of it, because, they "scorn the purposes of life" by showing an utter contempt for those things that may keep them in health and good humour.

Then wherefore not renounce them? No—the [dread,
The slavish dread of solitude, that breeds
Reflection and remorse, the fear of shame,
And their invet'rate habits, all forbid. 490
Whom call we gay? that honour has been long
The boast of mere pretenders to the name.
The innocent are gay—the lark is gay,
That dries his feathers saturate with dew

487. **Renounce them**—Give them up (*i.e.*) cards &c.

490. **Inveterate habits**—Life-long pursuit of follies.

Forbid—Stood in the way of.

491-96: **PARAPHRASE**—Who are the really gay? That name has long been assumed by those who have no right to such an honour. The guiltless are gay, the lark that dries its moist wing beneath the ruddy blushing cloud, of the morning before the sunbeams have reached its lowly nest, is gay.

491-492. **That honour...name**—Some people vainly call themselves gay, whereas, in reality, they do not deserve the name at all.

493. **The innocent, &c.**—True gaiety is only of those who do no harm to anybody. The 'lark,' and not the ravenous kite, is gay.

494. **Saturate with dew**—The lark builds his nest in the grass on the ground.

Saturate—Full of, a form of the *pp. saturated*, thoroughly wet.

Beneath the rosy cloud, while yet the beams 495
Of dayspring overshoot his humble nest.
The peasant too, a witness of his song,
Himself a songster, is as gay as he.
But save me from the gaiety of those
Whose headaches nail them to a noonday bed; 500

495. **Beneath the rosy cloud**—Under the cloud reddened by the early rays of the sun or under the crimson coloured cloud on the Eastern horizon. The lark soars very high. Shakespeare speaks of the lark as "singing at Heaven's gate."

496. **Dayspring**—The spring or early part of the day.

Overshoot—Pass over without touching. The sun being still in the horizon, his rays shoot parallel to the ground, and pass over the lark's nest

Humble—Low because built on the ground.

497-505. **PARAPHRASE**—The rustic, too, as he chaunts his song, is as gay as the lark whose song he listens to. But may I never share the gaiety of those whom headaches keep in bed till midday, nor of them, whose despairing look shows the pains they have suffered on account of losses in gambling; may the "gaiety" that racks the bones with pain and causes the mouth to blaspheme, and fills the soul with sorrow and dispair, never be mine.

498. **Himself a songster**—The peasant is not necessarily musical but he sings or tries to sing from sheer lightness of heart.

499. **But save me from**—But do not talk to me of.

500. **Nail**—Fix, as with a nail; confine.

And save me, too, from theirs whose haggard eyes
Flash desperation, and betray their pangs
For property stripped off by cruel chance ;
Form gaiety that fills the bones with pain,

501. **Haggard eyes**—Wild and wasted look.

502. **Flash desperation**—Cast looks of despair ; show by the wildness of their glances the desperate condition to which the gamblers have been reduced.

Pangs—Bitter regret.

For—Caused by, due to.

Stripped off—Taken away from them.

503. **Chance**—The chances *i.e.* the gaming talk.

503. **Property stripped off**—To what extent gambling prevailed in England, in the 18th century, may be judged from the following : "Legislation attempted to interfere, but with little success. Basset and hazard having been declared illegal, the famous game of E. O. was invented, and it was, for some time, the rage in London, and specially at Bath under the patronage of Beau Nash. It, too, was interdicted by Act of Parliament, 1782, but the statute was evaded. We read of ladies losing £5000 in a night. Fox lost £11,000 once at a sitting."—*Storr*.

Cowper refers to the subject, again in *Bk*. II. 656—658.

"Wives beggar husbands, husbands starve their wives,
On fortune's velvet altar offering up
Their last poor pittance—."
And again in Bk III. 760—763.
"The wings that waft our riches out of sight
Grow on the gamester's elbows, and the alert
And nimble motion of those restless joints,
That never tire, soon fans them all away."

504. **From gaity**—From the gaity of gamblers, which is a gaity that fills, &c.

The mouth with blasphemy, the heart with woe. 505

The earth was made so various, that the mind
Of desultory man, studious of change,
And pleased with novelty, might be indulged.

505. **Blasphemy**—Profane speaking, as of God or religion; here, impious language or cursing.

506-510. **PARAPHRASE**—The manifold beauties of the world were created to gratify the fickle mind of man, always longing after something new. The most beautiful scenes may be gazed at until they seem not half as beautiful; the eye, satiated with their familiar graces, turns aside, disdainful, to newer prospects.

506. **Various**—As we see it is.

507-9. The reason why the earth has so much variety in it is that it was so made, because men are by nature "desultory," *i.e.*, they cannot for long be fixed to one thing; they are studious of change (*i.e.*, they are fond of change) and they are pleased with novelty (*i. e.*, are only pleased when something new is continually brought before them.)

507. **Desultory**—(L. *de* from, and *salio* I leap) jumping from one thing to another; inconstant.

Studious—(L. *studium*, desire) fond.

508. **Pleased**—Along with 'studious,' adjectival to mind.

Indulged—Gratified.

Prospects, however lovely, may be seen
Till half their beauties fade ; the weary sight, 510
Too well-acquainted with their smiles, slides off
Fastidious, seeking less familiar scenes.
Then snug enclosures in the shelter'd vale,
Where frequent hedges intercept the eye,

510-11. **PARAPHRASE**— Scenes of the greatest beauty may be looked at till half their loveliness seems to vanish ; we may grow so much accustomed to beautiful scenery that we, at last, fail to appreciate its beauty.

510. **Till half their beauties fade**—Being frequently seen, they appear only half as beautiful as they appeared at first sight.

511. **Slides off**—"The metaphor seems taken from a screw or some piece of machinery, which, from long wear no longer bites. If so, *fastidious* is not a well-chosen epithet, as it confuses the conscious and unconscious effects of familiarity."—*Storr.*

512. **Fastidious**—Difficult to please ; over-nice (adverb.) A fastidious mind detects small defects and errors.

Familiar—Known.

513-17. **PARAPHRASE**—On such occasions we voluntarily leave, for a time, our favourite scenes, not because we are unconscious of their beauties, but in order that, after a short absence, we may enjoy them the more ; then the little fields in the secluded valley whose numerous hedge-rows obstruct our view, please us.

513. **Then**—Corresponds with 'then' in 518, and=*at this time*, and *at another time*, under such circumstances.

513. **Snug**—Comfortable.

514. **Intercept**—(L. *inter* between, and *capio* I take,) obstruct ; interrupt the progress of.

Intercept the eye—F

Delight us, happy to renounce awhile, 515
Not senseless of its charms, what still we love,
That such short absence may endear it more.
Then forests, or the savage rock may please,
That hides the sea-mew in his hollow clefts
Above the reach of man: his hoary head 520
Conspicuous many a league, the mariner,
Bound homeward, and in hope already there,
Greets with three cheers exulting. At his waist
A girdle of half-wither'd shrubs he shows,

515. **Awhile** = A + while (time) = for a time.

518-25. **PARAPHRASE**—Then forest scenes may charm us, or the rugged cliff, in whose hollow clinks, far away from human reach, the sea-gull lives, whose white summit the homeward bound sailor sees, while far from the shore, and, rejoicing, hails with three cheers; along whose middle grows a belt of faded bushes, and from whose bottom the dashing waves are beaten back.

518. **Savage**—Wild.

520. **Hoary**—*i.e.* A chalk-cliff.

521. **League**—Adv. object, denoting space. *A league* = 3½ English miles.

522. **Bound**—Going.

523. **At his waist**—Near the middle of the rock.

524. **Half withered**—Perhaps, because growing on a chalk cliff, and, consequently, not luxuriant.

And at his feet the baffled billows die. 525
The common overgrown with fern, and rough
With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deform'd
And dang'rous to the touch, has yet its bloom,
And decks itself with ornaments of gold,
Yields no unpleasing ramble; there the turf 530
Smells fresh, and, rich in odorif'rous herbs
And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense

525. **The baffled billows die**—The billows dash against the foot of the rock, but, unable to do any harm to it, they break themselves there.

526-33. **PARAPHRASE**—Then, too, we may enjoy a walk over the common covered with fern and thorny furze, which though ungraceful in form and painful to the touch, still adorns itself with golden blossom; there the earth smells sweet, and abounding in mushrooms and fragrant herbs, gratifies us with unexpected pleasant odours.

526. **Common**—An unenclosed or open tract of ground, so called, because it is common property.

527. **Gorse**—The furze; a low green prickly shrub with beautiful yellow flowers, growing on waste places.

529. **Ornaments of gold**—Yellow flowers.

530. **Yields**—The Nom. is '*common* supplied.'

532. **Fungous**—Belonging to the species *fungi* or *fungus*.

Fungous fruits.—Such as mushrooms.

With luxury of unexpected sweets.
There often wanders one, whom better days
Saw better clad, in cloak of satin trimm'd 535
With lace, and hat with splendid ribbon bound.
A serving-maid was she, and fell in love
With one who left her, went to sea, and died.

533. **Unexpected**—Because as they grow wild, one does not know what productions one will meet next.

534-58. **The story of the Crazed Kate**—The tale is lifelike and, as we might have guessed, taken from life; but its connection with what proceeds and follows, is very slight. The pupil may compare Wordswoth's *Affliction of Margaret*, and the history of the other Margaret in the first book of the *Excursion*.

534. **Better days saw**—Days are personified by a common idiom. The meaning is, who was better clad in more fortunate days.

535-6. **The cloak of satin trimm'd with lace**—Seems rather an expensive garment for a serving-maid.

536. **Splendid**—Bright-coloured.

538. **Left her**—*i.e.*, left her to go to sea.

Went to sea—Became a sailor.

Her fancy follow'd him through foaming waves
To distant shores, and she would sit and weep 540
At what a sailor suffers; fancy too,
Delusive most where warmest wishes are,
Would oft anticipate his glad return,
And dream of transports she was not to know.

539-44. **PARAPHRASE**—In imagination, she followed him over the sea to distant countries, and she would often sit alone and mourn over the hardships of a sailor's life; in imagination, too, which often cheats one with the belief that what one wishes most will be realised, she would often picture to herself his joyful return, and think of pleasures that she was never to enjoy.

539. **Fancy**—Imagination, *i. e.* she thought of him as sailing over the waves and visiting distant shores.

540. **Would sit**—Used to sit and *in imagination*, she saw the sufferings of a sailor's life; she would sit and weep for the sufferings of the man she loved, as if *she were in his company*.

542. **Delusive, &c.**—Which usually beguiles us with the expectation that what we most wish will take place. A beautiful line, conveying a true idea. Man is very often prone to imagine the realisation of his earnest wishes, and is as often disappointed.

543. **Glad**—(Active) Causing gladness.

544. **Dream, &c.**—She would then imagine also the excess of delight that should attend the return of the sailor.

She was not to know—She was not *destined* to experience. 'Know' is in contrast with 'dream.'

Transports—The great joy of re-union.

She heard the doleful tidings of his death— 545
And never smiled again! And now she roams
The dreary waste; there spends the livelong day,
And there, unless when charity forbids,
The livelong night. A tatter'd apron hides,
Worn as a cloak, and hardly hides, a gown 550
More tatter'd still; and both but ill conceal
A bosom heaved with never-ceasing sighs.

545-56. **PARAPHRASE**—She heard the sad news of his death, and never smiled afterwards. And now she wanders over the lonely common, where she remains all the day, and all the night, too, unless some charitable person offers her shelter. A ragged apron, which she wears in the place of a cloak, scarcely conceals a still more ragged dress: and the two together are scarcely enough to hide the unceasing sighs with which her bosom is moved. She asks every one she meets for a useless pin, and when she gets it, she stores it up in her sleeve; but though she is often pinched with hunger and numbed with cold, she never begs for food or better clothes. In short, poor Kate is mad!

545. **Doleful**—Sorrowful.

Unless when charity forbids—Except when some charitable people give her a night's lodging, and, thus, prevent her from passing the night in the open air.

Apron—A piece of cloth or linen worn in front, and tied round the waist to keep the dress clean. The old spelling of *apron* was *napron*; the *n* was gradually dropped through a mistaken notion that it was a part of the article. Thus *a napron* became *an apron*: cf. *adder*, *orange*, *umpire*.

Worn as a cloak—The apron, instead of being put to its legitimate use, was thrown over her shoulders.

551. **Ill**—Imperfectly.

She begs an idle pin of all she meets,
And hoards them in her sleeve; but needful food,
Though press'd with hunger oft, or comelier cloth-
[es, 555
Though pinch'd with cold, asks never.—Kate is
[crazed!

I see a column of slow-rising smoke,
O'ertop the lofty wood that skirts the wild,
A vagabond and useless tribe there eat
Their miserable meal. A kettle, slung 560
Between two poles upon a stick transverse,
Receives the morsel—flesh obscene of dog,

553. **Idle**—Useless; she had no use in collecting the pins.

555. **Comelier**—More decent.

556. **Kate is crazed**—This sums up the reasons for the eccentricities described. Her madness is told at the end more effectively than if we were first acquainted with it, and then with its effects. *Kate* is the abbreviated form of *Catherine*, as *Bess* of *Elizabeth*, *Peg* of *Margaret*. *crazed* = head *cracked*. "Notice the artistic way in which the climax is kept to the end. The symptoms are given one by one, and, at last, we arrive at the only possible *explanation* of them."

557-561. *A description of a gipsy encampment—their fare, their looks, their habits. Fortune-tellers, beggars and impostors, strangely preferring their squalor to honest comfort; they can yet have an occasion to be merry, and their outdoor life secures them health.* Read Wordsworth's poem on the same subject. Cowper, here, seems to me to bear the palm. His description is more graphic. What can be happier than

"A tawny skin,
The vellum of the pedigree they claim"?

His sympathy is more genial. Wordsworth is strictly just to

them and no more, and there is here none of that obtrusive self-consciousness which disfigures Wordsworth's otherwise fine poem. See a criticism of the poem in Coleridge's ***Biographia Literaria***.

557-69. **PARAPHRASE**—Above the tall trees that bound the common, I see a pillar of slowly ascending smoke. It marks the spot where a worthless wandering company of Gipsies are cooking their wretched food. Their meat, consisting of the loathsome flesh of a dog, or vermin, or, at best, of a stolen fowl. is placed in a pot, which is suspended from a stick. supported by two upright posts. What a life of hardship is theirs! Out of the hedges, they gather their fire-wood, which they light by means of dried leaves, and thus procure barely sufficient warmth to keep themselves alive. Their ragged clothes, disordered by the playful breeze, expose their dark brown skins which indicate their Eastern origin.

557. **Slow-rising**—Heavy.

558. **O'er-top**—Surmounting.

559. **Vagabond**—(L. *vagari* to wander)—Wandering, vagrant.

Useless—Strange that an Evangelic Christian poet should call anything "useless" under the sun. The meaning seems to be 'doing no good to human society.'

561. **Transverse**—Laid across from one pole to the other.

562. **Morsel**—Bit, piece.

Obscene—Foul, revolting. The word is used in a different sense in line 104.

Or vermin, or, at best, of cock purloin'd
From his accustom'd perch. Hard-faring race!
They pick their fuel out of ev'ry hedge, 565
Which, kindled with dry leaves, just saves unquen-
[ch'd
The spark of life. The sportive wind blows wide
Their flutt'ring rags, and shows a tawny skin,

563. **Vermin** – Latin *vermis*, a worm. The word usually means small and destructive animals such as rats and mice, stoats, pole-cats, &c. This is the sense in which a sportsman would use the word, and this is what Cowper means. Sometimes, however, it is used for foul and repulsive insects, the progeny of dirty habits, such as bugs, lice, &c.

563. **Purloined**—Stolen.

567. **The spark of life**—*i.e.*, the fire.

568-70. **PARAPHRASE**—When their rags are blown aside by the wind, their dark-coloured skin becomes visible, and, in it, is carefully written down, as it were, who were the ancestors of these persons, *i.e.*, the colour of their skin shows their descent.

The vellum of the pedigree they claim.
Great skill have they in palmistry, and more 570
To conjure clean away the gold they touch,
Conveying worthless dross into its place;
Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal.
Strange! that a creature rational, and cast
In human mould, should brutalise by choice 575
His nature, and, though capable of arts
By which the world might profit and himself,
Self-banish'd from society, prefer

569. **The Vellum, &c.**—Their tawny skin is the *vellum* (parchment) on which is written their *pedigree* (the race from which they are descended).

Vellum—Parchment made of calf-skin instead of goat-skin.

The pedigree or genealogical tree of noble families is usually written on *vellum* or parchment, and the gipsy skin is called the vellum of their pedigree because its colour indicates their Eastern origin.

The gipsies are scattered all over Europe. It is now believed that they came from India. They are, probably, one of the nomad tribes, not unfrequently, met with in Tartary. Their habits of life tally exactly with the poet's description.

570-73. **PARAPHRASE**—They are skilful in fortune-telling, and still better skilled in stealing the money they handle, and replacing it by worthless counterfeits. Loud and importunate, when they beg, they are silent only when they pilfer.

570. **Palmistry**—The art of telling fortunes by means of the hand.

571. **Clean**—Wholly.

Clean away—Completely out of sight.

572. **Conveying, etc.**—Some money must be put into the gipsy's hand, before he tells anybody's fortune. In lieu of the money, he gives him "dross" or worthless prediction. *Dross* is the scum or refuse matter thrown off from the metal in melting the *ore*, as dug up from the mine.

574-91. **PARAPHRASE**—It is wonderful that a reasonable being—a man—should, of his own choice, thus lower himself, and, though qualified for arts which might be beneficial both to himself and others, yet choose to separate himself from society, and live a life of degrading idleness, rather than one of industry: Still even these people, though often, while pretending to be sick, they bind up their foreheads, trail a leg on the ground, or torment their bodies with self-inflicted wounds, can, when opportunity offers, exchange their doleful cries for merry laughter, and, dancing to the music of the drum and the bagpipe, forget their sorrows, and make the woods re-echo with their joyful strains. So healthy and gay are these homeless wanderers of the woods! They want no other medicine besides the pure open air. and exercise, to cure the evil consequences of unwholesome food, poverty and cold.

575. **Cast in human mould**—Shaped like a man.

Rational—Exercising the reasoning faculty.

Brutalise by choice his nature—Behave deliberately like a beast.

576-79. **PARAPHRASE**—Though he has it in his power to exercise arts which might do good to the world as well as to himself, still, being separated from the entire world by his own wish, he will rather be in a state of misery than work hard.

576. **Capable of arts**—Able to produce things of art.

Such squalid sloth to honourable toil.
Yet even these, though, feigning sickness oft 580
They swathe the forehead, drag the limping limb,
And vex their flesh with artificial sores,
Can change their whine into a mirthful note
When safe occasion offers, and with dance,
And music of the bladder and the bag, 585
Beguile their woes, and make the woods resound.
Such health and gaiety of heart enjoy
The houseless rovers of the sylvan world;

579. **Squalid**—Filthy or dirty through neglect.

581-86. **PARAPHRASE**—Though these people often pretend to be sick, and tie a bandage round their forehead as if they were in pain, though they often walk about as though they were lame, though they produce artificial sores, yet they can change their sad voice to one of joy.

581. **Swathe**—Bind.

Drag the limping limb—Walk lamely.

582. **Vex**—Torment, imitate.

583. **Whine**—A mendicant's complaint.

585. **The bladder and the bag**—The drum and the bagpipe. A sort of *hendiadys*.

586. **Beguile their woes**—Cheer their hearts; forget their troubles.

587-88. **PARAPHRASE**—Those who wander about in the woods without any house of their own enjoy health and happiness.

588. **The sylvan world**—The woods.

And breathing wholesome air, and wand'ring much,
Need other physic none to heal th' effects 590
Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold.
Blest he, though undistinguish'd from the crowd

589. **Wandering much**—Taking plenty of exercise.

590. **Physic**—Medicine.

591. **Loathsome diet**—Filthy food as described in lines, 562-563.

592-678. **The advantages of civilized, over savage life, illustrated by the story of Omai**—"Two opposite views prevailed in Cowper's time as to the original condition of society.—1. That it was in a state of primitive simplicity and innocence. This was the view supported by Rousseau in his famous *Contract Social*; and by Pope (though Pope is not consistent) in his *Essay on Man*. The view that Cowper here adopts is, that man has raised himself, by means of his instinct of gregariousness, and his experience of utility from a state of misery and degradation, such, as, at the present day, prevails universally among all known savage tribes.

Note—In *a* 'though undistinguish'd' would by some be expanded into,—'though he be undistinguish'd' and regarded as a separate sentence: similarly,—'though slow to learn,' would be made—'though he is slow to learn.' Such we do not regard as the correct method of treatment. Since 'undistinguish'd' is a participle depending on *he*: and *slow* is an adj. to *man*. All participial phrases are enlargements of the subject and not dependent sentences.

592-99. '**Blest he...hands**'—That man is happy, though possessing neither wealth, nor honours, who lives free from danger in a country where men, having tamed their naturally savage dispositions, have gradually adopted the occupations and the habits of civilized life. His desires are indeed numerous, but the mode of gratifying them is plain, for his moderate wishes are easily satisfied by diligent labour.

592. **Rousseau** and his followers would have put *curst* for *blest* here. They held that association with man corrupted man—and consequently town and cities were necessarily mere scenes of iniquity. Cowper, here, in opposition to this contrahuman doctrine, proclaims the grand benefits of society. He had no sympathy with that shallow misanthropy. Evils there might be when men congregated together; but what infinite blessings are there too! What possibilities of growth and development, and instruction, and charity! The words that he puts into Alexander Selkirk's lips came from his own heart:—

"Society, friendship and love,
 Divinely bestowed upon man.
O had I the wings of a dove,
 How soon would I taste you again!
My sorrows I then might assuage
 In the ways of religion and truth,
Might learn from the wisdom of age,
 And be cheered by the sallies of youth."

592. **Penury**—Poverty.

592-698. *ANALYSIS—The advantages of civilised over savage life—civilisation favourable to the growth of virtue.*

592. **He**—That man.

Though undistinguished, etc.—Though in no way remarkable.

By wealth or dignity, who dwells secure
Where man, by nature fierce, has laid aside
His fierceness, having learnt, though slow to learn, [595
The manners and the arts of civil life.
His wants, indeed, are many ; but supply
Is obvious ; placed within the easy reach

593. **Secure**—Used here in its usual sense.

594. '**By nature fierce**'—There are two contrary views as to the *original* condition of man. 1.—That he was created fierce and savage, but he has been improved by 'civilisation.' 2. That he was created pure and innocent, but that before the birth of his first child he was corrupted by sin, and that all his descendants, therefore, inherited an 'infection of nature' from him. Perhaps the poet's thoughts did not go so far back as a full discussion of this question would necessitate. What a man *is* now is of more importance than what he *was* in prehistoric times.

594. **Where man, etc.**—In a civilised society.

595. **Though slow to learn**—Though he was a long time in throwing off his natural savageness.

596. **Civil**—Civilised (L. *civis*, a city). The gist of the passage is that in a civilised society, even a poor man is *blessed* (fortunate).

597-99. **PARAPHRASE**—It is true that as a member of civilized society man has more wants than in the savage state, but those can be readily supplied, if he is but industrious and moderate in his desires.

597. **His wants**—The wants of a man in civilised society.

598. **Obvious**—Easily procurable.

Of temp'rate wishes and industrious hands.
Here virtue thrives as in her proper soil; 600
Not rude and surly, and beset with thorns,
And terrible to sight, as when she springs
(If e'er she springs spontaneous) in remote
And barb'rous climes, where violence prevails,

599. **Temperate**—Moderate.

600-607. **PARAPHRASE**—In such a country virtue flourishes like a plant growing in a favourable soil; it is not accompanied by morose, churlish manners, or surrounded by difficulties, and it is not repulsive in its aspect, as when it springs unnurtured in distant, savage countries, where brute force rules instead of law. On the contrary, it is mild and benevolent, softened by education, and invigorated by freedom with its good effects perfected by truthfulness. Comp. Book IV. 656-62.

Bk. IV, 659-662.

> "Man in society is like a flower
> Blown in its *native bed*; 'tis there alone,
> His faculties, expanded in full bloom,
> Shine out; there only reach their proper use."

600. **Here**—*i.e.*, in such a civilized community.

600. **Virtue thrives, etc.**—*Proper*—own (L. *proprium* one's own). *Virtue*, radically signifies manhood.

601. **PARAPRASE**—Among civilized men virtue is to be found; virtue grows very well in civilization as a plant grows in that soil which is most suited to it.

601. **Rude and surly, etc.**—Virtue is spoken of as a plant.

And strength is lord of all; but gentle, kind, 605
By culture tamed, by liberty refresh'd,
And all her fruits by radiant truth matured.
War and the chase engross the savage whole;
War follow'd for revenge, or to supplant
The envied tenants of some happier spot; 610

605. **Strength is lord of all**—"Might is right."

606. **By culture, etc.**—Virtue is tamed (made mild) by the culture of the people and invigorated by *liberty* (absence of tyrannical oppression in society).

Liberty—Well-regulated liberty The liberty of the savage is nominal. He does whatever he likes. Exactly; but so does the next savage. Suppose their likings are contrary—then a fight is the consequence. Such liberty degenerates into the rule of the strongest.

Refresh'd—Strengthened.

607. **Fruits**—The fruits of virtue are good actions.

Radiant truth—From Cowper's point of view it is the creed of Christianity.

Matured—Brought to perfection. The root in this word is the same as in *magnus*, great, the English main, etc., the idea being, increase in size or greatness.

608—16. **PARAPHRASE**—Barbarous tribes devote their lives entirely to hunting and fighting; the latter they pursue to gratify revenge or to dispossess others of their more favourite homes; the former yields them an uncertain subsistence. The severities of the barbarian's life clog and confine his mental powers, preventing all advance in wisdom or in what is good, but fostering fraud, unforgiving hatred, and selfishness.

608. **Engross**—Occupy.

609. **Supplant**—Oust; drive out.

610. **Happier**—More fertile.

The chase for sustenance, precarious trust!
His hard condition with severe constraint
Binds all his faculties, forbids all growth
Of wisdom, proves a school in which he learns
Sly circumvention, unrelenting hate, 615
Mean self-attachment, and scarce aught beside.
Thus fare the shiv'ring natives of the north,
And thus the ranger's of the western world,

611. **For sustenance**—As a means of living.

Precarious trust—An uncertain trust, as the chase may be unsuccessful occasionally.

613. **Binds all his faculties** Checks the exercise of his intellect.

614. **School**—System of training.

615. **Sly circumvention**—Cunning deception.

616. **Mean self-attachment**—Base selfishness.

Scarce aught else—These are almost the only things he learns.

617-20. **PARAPHRASE**—Such is the life of the inhabitants of the cold North, and such that of the Indians who wander over the American Continent, where it stretches far into the Southern Ocean.

617. **Thus fare**—Such is the state of things with.

Natives of the North—Esquimaux.

618-20. **PARAPHRASE**—The poet, no doubt, refers here, to the inhabitants of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, in South America. The Patagonian Indians, a tall muscular race, lead a nomadic life, and subsist by the produce of the chase and by fishing. The natives of Tierra del Fuego are a stunted race, sunk in the deepest degradation. They live by hunting and fishing.

618. **Rangers**—Wanderers, Roving robbers.

Rangers of the western world, &c.—Cowper means the savage inhabitants of New Zealand and the neighbouring islands.

Where it advances far into the deep,
Towards th' Antarctic. Ev'n the favour'd isles, 620
So lately found, although the constant sun
Cheer all their seasons with a grateful smile,
Can boast but little virtue; and inert
Through plenty, lose in morals, what they gain

620-25. **PARAPHRASE**—And even in those lately discovered Tropical islands, where continual sunshine enlivens every season of the year, there is not much virtue; the inhabitants, rendered slothful by the natural fertility of their land, sink into a life of idle pleasure, and thus, though their manners are easy, grow lax in morals.

620. **The favoured isles**—Captain Cook's discoveries in the Pacific.

621. **So lately found**—Cowper here alludes to the visit of Captain Cook to these islands, in 1769. They were discovered by the Spaniards long ago (1606). Captain Cook gave them the names they bear.

Constant sun—They have a perpetual sun.

Grateful—Agreeable.

623. **Can boast, &c.**—Cowper seems to suggest that a cultured society alone is favourable to the growth of virtue. There can be no virtue at all among savages who are wholly engrossed with the war and the chase. Nor can there be any virtue in a society where nature is too luxuriant and the people have no motives for self-exertion as is the case with the people of the *favoured* isles.

Inert—Inactive; refers to 'isles.'

624. **Loose in morals, &c.**—Voluptuous, licentious.

In manners, victims of luxurious ease. 625
These therefore I can pity, placed remote
From all that science traces, art invents,
Or inspiration teaches; and enclosed
In boundless oceans, never to be pass'd
By navigators uninform'd as they, 630

625. **Victims of luxurious ease**—Spoiled by idleness.

626-31. **PARAPHRASE**—I can commiserate the people, living in ignorance of science, civilized arts, and the truths of religion. They are surrounded by an expanse of ocean, too wide to be crossed by their unskilful mariners, and which will, perhaps, never be crossed by an Englishman again.

627. **All that science traces, &c.**—The researches of historians.

628. **Inspiration**—The inspired truths of Christianity.

630. **By navigators uninformed, &c.**—'There they are, in the middle of a vast ocean which they are themselves, far too ignorant of navigation, unable to cross, and though British sailors have skill enough to reach them, yet it is doubtful whether any Englishman will take the trouble to sail to such an out-of-the-way place again.'

Or plough'd perhaps by British bark again.
But far beyond the rest, and with most cause
Thee, gentle savage ! whom no love of thee
Or thine, but curiosity perhaps,

631. **Or ploughed, &c.**—If the islanders themselves cannot cross the ocean, those who can cross might come to them. The poet silences this supposition, as not very likely. But the event has completely falsified this prophecy. "In 1820, Kamchameha, the king of the Sandwich Islands, was converted to Christianity by the Methodist Missionaries. The islands, subsequently, made rapid progress in civilisation; trade flourished, and even printing presses were set up. The king was, however, not long after, expelled; and the islands have since been under a representative government. *Taiti* and the Society Islands, in 1842, put themselves under the protection of the French."—*Storr*

The Fiji Islands, one of the Friendly Islands group, have been annexed by the British Government

632-38 **PARAPHRASE**--But most of all, and for a still stronger reason, do I pity thee, noble savage ! It was no desire to benefit thee or thy race, but rather perhaps a wish to gratify our curiosity, or merely soothe our pride, that induced us to bring thee from thy native home and shew thee how the people of this country misuse the blessings of God, and waste their lives in idle pleasures.

633. **Gentle savage**—"Omai" was a native of the Friendly Islands. He acted as interpreter to Captain Cook in his third voyage, and came to England with him in 1775. He was naturally an object of very great interest in London circles, and he charmed everybody by his intelligence, modesty, and self-reliance. Dr. Johnson was delighted with him; and Reynolds painted him. Cowper was correct in supposing that he pined after English refinement after his return home, though it was only a guess introduced as a vehicle for satire on our own frivolity. It was afterwards related that he entreated pathetically to be carried back to England again.

Or else vain-glory, prompted us to draw 635
Forth from thy native bow'rs, to show thee here
With what superior skill we can abuse
The gifts of Providence, and squander life.
The dream is past. And thou hast found again
Thy cocoas and bananas, palms and yams, 640

637. **With what superior skill, &c.**—The countrymen of Omai abuse the gifts of Providence by their sloth. Cowper means to say that the English people also abuse the gifts of Providence, but far more skilfully.

638. **The dream**—Such his visit appears to Omai.

639-53. **PARAPHRASE**—But now thy short stay with us is over, and thou hast returned to the cocoas, palms, bananas, yams and leaf-covered huts of thy own land. Do they still please thee as formerly? Now that thou hast witnessed our magnificence, the splendour of our palaces, the gorgeous style of our carriages, our gardens, and pastimes, and hast mixed in the society of our ladies, and listened to our music, do thy artless countrymen, their plain food and simple pleasures yield thee the same delight that they did before? Dost thou value thy country's joys as thou didst before partaking of ours? Though thou art unenlightened; (for thou hast learnt nothing of civilized life beyond its outward appearances) still I cannot believe thee to have so little taste for pleasures, and so little wish for them, as not to grieve at their loss just at the moment thou hadst become able to appreciate them.

640. **Cocoa**—A kind of palm tree.

Yams—These grow best in the West Indies. They are roots which form a nutritious food. The other plants, mentioned, need no explanation.

Banana—Plantain.

And homestall thatch'd with leaves.
But hast thou found
Their former charms? And, having seen our state,
Our palaces, our ladies, and our pomp
Of equipage, our gardens, and our sports,
And heard our music; are thy simple friends, 645
Thy simple fare, and all thy plain delights
As dear to thee as once? And have thy joys
Lost nothing by comparison with ours?
Rude as thou art (for we return'd thee rude
And ignorant, except of outward show) 650

641-42. **PARAPHRASE**—Have they the same charms for you that they had before?

641. **Homestall**—Homestead; home.

642. **Their former charms**—As charming as they were formerly, before you came to England.

647. **Once**—Formerly, and does not mean 'on one occasion.'

650. **Of outward show**—*i.e.*, in clothing, you are no longer rudely dressed.

I cannot think thee yet so dull of heart
And spiritless, as never to regret
Sweets tasted here, and left as soon as known.
Methinks I see thee straying on the beach,

654-60. **PARAPHRASE**—I fancy I see thee wandering along the shore ; and inquiring of the waves that flow at thy feet, whether they have ever visited the coast of Britain. Again, I see thee sadly weeping with heart-felt grief, on account of the mean and wretched condition of thy country, which thou canst not improve.

654. **PARAPHRASE**—The verb, here, is not *think*. It is from S. *thincan*, to see ; while *think*, in its usual meaning, is from S. *thencan*, to think. *Methink—It thinks me—It seems to me.* Latham says, the verbs *methinks*, *meseems* (it seems to me) and *me listeth* or *lists* (it pleases me) are the only true impersonal verbs in the English language. See Bk. VI. 638.

Note.—*Seem* and *appear* are two words which our students greatly misuse. In many cases, either word may be used, but there are others, in which only one can. If we are judging of the merits of a question we can either say "it seems to me" or "it appears to me." So, looking at a thing at a distance, "it seems to be a long way off" is as correct as, "it appears to be a long way off." But in, "the foliage arrests the eye as the trees appear, &c.;" *seem* cannot be used. So we can speak of '*seeming*' friendship, while 'appearing friendship' is inadmissible, though "*apparent friendship*" may be used. The exact use of each word can be learnt only by reading; and no rule is of universal application, or a safe guide.—M. J. *Ed.*

654. **Methinks**—It *appears* to me, and *not* '*I think*'. This *thinks* is altogether a different verb from the common verb 'think' ; and it is used impersonally. *Me* being in the dative case. Comp. *Meseems*, *melists*, etc.

And asking of the surge that bathes thy foot 655
If ever it has wash'd our distant shore.
I see thee weep, and thine are honest tears,
A patriot's for his country. Thou art sad
At thought of her forlorn and abject state,
From which no power of thine can raise her up. 660
Thus fancy paints thee, and, though apt to err,
Perhaps errs little when she paints thee thus
She tells me too that duly ev'ry morn
Thou climb'st the mountain top, with eager eye

655. **Surge**—The breaking wave. (Latin *surgere*—to rise.)

656. **If ever, &c.**—A very poetical fancy. The returned savage, longing for England (as he really did) soothes himself with the belief that the wave which breaks on his shore has travelled from the distant country he sighs for. Omai is not the only exile, but many hundreds, to whom some such fancy has occurred.

657. **See thee, &c.**—Imagine thee weeping.

659. **Forlorn and abject state**—Which appears all the more so from the contrast with the great country he has recently left.

659. **Forlorn**—Forsaken; solitary.

Abject—Degraded.

661-68. **PARAPHRASE**—Thus my imagination pictures thee, and, though it often deceives us, it is probably not far wrong in this instance. I fancy, too, that every morning thou clamberest to the top of a mountain, and gazest anxiously over the surrounding ocean to catch sight, if possible, of an English ship. Every object which becomes visible in the distant horizon agitates thy mind with conflicting hopes and fears.

661. **Though apt to err, &c.**—Though liable to error.

Exploring far and wide the wat'ry waste 665
For sight of ship from England. Ev'ry speck,
Seen in the dim horizon, turns thee pale
With conflict of contending hopes and fears.
But comes at last the dull and dusky eve,
And sends thee to thy cabin, well prepared 670

666-68. **PARAPHRASE**—Every peck, seen in the far-off horizon generates hope in your mind that it may be a ship from England. The next moment, you fear, it may not be what you wish, and you turn pale at the prospect of disappointment.

669-77. **PARAPHRASE**—But at length the dim twilight of evening arrives, and thou returnest disappointed to thy hut, to dream all night of what thou hast vainly sought for during the day. Think of it no more. We found nothing in thy poor country to induce us to visit it again. (It is not our custom to trouble ourselves for the benefit of others, without the hope of gain.) We do, indeed, visit distant countries, but it is in search of wealth. And it will require greater advantages than you can offer to tempt us to circumnavigate the world again.

669. **The dull and dusky eve**—The dim twilight of evening.

669-670. **Well prepared, &c**—Perhaps Cowper, here, alludes to a psychological truth that we usually dream of those things in our sleep, which we brood over during the day. By watching for an English ship for the whole day, Omai goes to bed, well fitted to dream of it in his sleep

To dream all night of what the day denied.
Alas ! expect it not. We found no bait
To tempt us in thy country. Doing good,
Disinterested good, is not our trade.
We travel far, 'tis true, but not for nought, 675
And must be bribed to compass earth again

672. **Bait**—Allurement. In a letter to Joseph Hill, Esq., dated July 13, 1777, Cowper writes: "'Tis well for the poor natives of those distant countries that our national expenses cannot be supplied by cargoes of yams and bananas. Curiosity, therefore, being once satisfied, they may possibly be permitted for the future to enjoy their riches of that kind in peace."

673-75. **PARAPHRASE**—This might be asserted of any nation. It would, however, be impossible to name a nation, either of ancient or modern times, that has done more good than England has done, and is doing, and by God's help, is likely yet to do.

673. **Not our trade**—Not our business.

675. **Not for nought**—Not without an end in view; we do not travel for nothing.

Bribed—Induced.

675. **Compass**—Sail round.

By other hopes, and richer fruits than yours.
But though true worth and virtue, in the mild
And genial soil of cultivated life,
Thrive most, and may perhaps thrive only there, 680
Yet not in cities oft; in proud and gay
And gain-devoted cities. Thither flow,

677. **Other hopes and richer fruits**—Hopes of greater gain. Possibly the state of English society in Cowper's time gave him some excuse for passing such bitter remarks on the English people. Nobody, *now*, can say that doing disinterested good is not the trade of the countrymen of Howard, or of Livingstone, or of Clarkson.

678-80. **PARAPHRASE**—Yet though moral excellence is found chiefly perhaps only in civilized countries, it is not common in great splendid towns where people are bent only on acquiring wealth. The most worthless inhabitants of every country collect in the towns, as filth flows into a common noxious drain.

678-748. *ANALYSIS—Towns are centres of vice, luxury and extravagance. Their only redeeming merit is that they encourage art, natural philosophy and commerce. Examples—Reynolds, Bacon, copper-plate engraving, scientific instruments, increase of wealth and numbers of London. The reverse of the shield shows faulty police; faulty legislation, by which petty offenders are punished too severely and great offenders escape; neglect of the Sunday*—STORR.

678. **True worth**—Moral excellence.

679. **Genial soil**—Favourable to growth.

682. **Gain devoted**—Devoted to gain. Such compounds were frequent in the Elizabethan writers.

As to a common and most noisome sewer,
The dregs and feculence of ev'ry land.
In cities, foul example on most minds 685
Begets its likeness. Rank abundance breeds

683. **Noisome sewer**—Filthy drain. *Noisome* is injurious to health; from the root of *noxious*. *Sewer* is an underground drain or passage to carry off water and filth from cities.

684. **Dregs and feculence**—Both denote filthy refuse matter. *Dregs* is applied to denote the dirty matter that settles at the bottom of a bottle of wine. Hence, metaphorically, it is used to denote the vilest or most worthless part of anything; as, the *dregs* of society. It is now always used in the plural.

685-91. **PARAPHRASE**—And not only are towns receptacles for what is bad; but there, too, bad example produces, in most people, similar wickedness. In great luxurious cities, an excess of wealth creates idleness, intemperance, lewd desires, and debauchery. There, also, wickedness is more easily concealed than in the country, or, if discovered, is less censured; and so many of the good are corrupted, that but small hope of retaining their virtue uncontaminated remains to the rest, except by escaping from the scene of vice.

686. **Beget its likeness**—Leads to similar bad conduct; the example of morally depraved persons make many others also depraved.

Rank abundance—Extreme profusion.

In gross and pamper'd cities sloth and lust,
And wantonness and gluttonous excess.
In cities, vice is hidden with most ease,
Or seen with least reproach ; (and virtue, taught 690
By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there.
Beyond the achievement of successful flight.)

687. **Gross and pampered**—Coarse and luxurious.

Sloth and Lust—These two along with *wantonness* and *excess*, are the objects to *breeds*.

Cowper means to say, 'profusion begets idleness, and idleness begets voluptuousness, which again drags with it its associates—frivolity and intemperance.

689-92. **PARAPHRASE**—In cities, vice is most easily kept out of sight ; or, if known, involves less disgrace than elsewhere ; and of the virtuous even, so many fall, that none can be sure of resisting in the city evil influence except by getting beyond its reach.

689. **In cities vice, &c.**—Because, in cities the population is very large, and one is known only to a few persons, and there are numberless facilities for concealing vice. If any shameful act becomes public, it is not considered so much a matter of reproach, because it is almost a common occurence there. In the country, however, the dread of public opinion, prevents a man from lapsing into vice, even, if he be ardently inclined to it. Again, in the country, society disclaims a man whose moral depravity has been made public.

691. **Lapse**—Slip, fall from the path of rectitude. Failure of duty.

691-692. **PARAPHRASE**—Virtue finds there is no escape from falling into error, unless she runs away from the place. Cf. "Where 'tis hard to combat learn to fly" *Goldsmith.*

I do confess the them nurseries of the arts,
In which they flourish most ; wherre, in the beams
Of warm encouragement, and in the eye 695
Of public note, they reach their perfect size.
Such London is by taste and wealth proclaimed
The fairest capital in all the world :

PARAPHRASE—The meaning is, that from the prevalence of error, virtue can achieve nothing but its own flight from the place where appears little room for its exercise, and where its absence is striking.

693. **Nurseries**—Places for rearing up young plants.

694. **In which &c.**—In which nurseries, they (the arts) flourish (grow) most. Observe how our poet is fond of employing the metaphor of plants, gardening being one of his favourite occupations.

696. **They reach their perfect size**—They attain their full development, warmly patronised by the public, and encouraged by the prospect of popular fame.

Beams—Rays.

(There are other reasons besides these, why art flourishes most in towns, among which may be mentioned the facilities, they afford in sending the products to foreign countries and in the supply of the necesssary materials and implements.)

697. **By taste and wealth**—In respect of taste and in point of wealth.

Taste—Critical appreciation of excellence, particularly in the fine arts. The phrase may also mean 'by persons having taste, and persons having wealth;' for such only are fit to make a correct estimation.

698. **In all the world**—This is the reading in the *English School classics*. The *Globe* edition reads *of* for *in*.

By riot and incontinence the worst.
There, touched by Reynolds, a dull blank becomes [700
A lucid mirror, in which Nature sees
All her reflected features. Bacon there
Gives more than female beauty to a stone,
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips.
Nor does the chisel occupy alone 705
The powers of sculpture, but the style as much :

699. **By riot, &c.**—This is the other side of the picture. London is the fairest capital city in all the world in point of the artistic taste, and the wealth of its inhabitants; while in point of riot and of excessive indulgence of lust and immoderate eating and drinking, it is the worst.

Riot—May be taken to mean 'wild and loose feasting'; or 'revelry.' But, *perhaps*, the poet, here, refers to the 'No Popery Riots', headed by Lord George Gordon, which happened within a few years of the composition of these lines. In 1778, a bill was passed relieving the Roman Catholics of many of their civil disabilities. The Protestants did not like this. In 1780, the Protestant mob, under Lord George Gordon, marched to the House of Commons and burst into the lobby. For five days, London was at the mercy of the mob that burnt down many prisons and private houses.

700-704. **PARAPHRASE**—In London, Reynolds paints nature's forms on the dull canvass, as perfectly as if they were reflected from the bright surface of a mirror. There, Bacon carves a female figure with loveliness surpassing that of the original and hews in marble the eloquent features of Chatham.

700. **Reynolds**—Sir Joshua Reynolds, a famous portrait and historical painter. He was born, in 1723, and he died in 1792. In 1769, he was unanimously chosen president of

the Royal Academy; and the discourses which he delivered, from time to time, on the principles and practice of painting have been generally and deservedly admired. Reynolds has been justly said to be the founder of the British School of Painting. Goldsmith thus describes him in his poem on *Retaliation* :—

"Here Reynolds is laid, and to tell you my mind,
He has not left a wiser or better behind:
His pencil was striking, resistless, and grand,
His manners were gentle, complying, and bland;
Still born to improve us in every part,
His pencil our faces, his manners our heart"

A dull blank, &c.—The opaque canvass, on which the painting is made is turned into a clear mirror, in which Nature finds her exact image reflected.

702. **Bacon**—John Bacon (1740 -1799) an eminent sculptor. Cowper much admired his statue of Lord Chatham in Westminster Abbey.

703. **Gives more than, &c.**—Makes his marble statues very beautiful. (Is the poet consistent here with what he said in l. 425. "But nature's work far lovelier ?")

704. **Chatham**—William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, one of the greatest orators and statesmen of the eighteenth century, and father of the still more famous William Pitt, the younger. He was born, in 1708, and, he died in 1778. He was honoured with a public funeral in Westminster Abbey. Of the figure of Chatham, on the monument, Cowper thus writes—'I think the figure of Lord Chatham singularly graceful, and his countenance full of character that belongs to him.

Of the figure of Chatham, Macaulay says—"High over those venerable graves, towers the stately monument of Chatham, and, from above, his effigy, graven by a cunning hand seems still, with eagle face and outstretched arm, to bid England be of good cheer, and to hurl defiance at her foes."

And Chatham's eloquence &c.—The expression of the lips of the marble statue of Chatham, has been just what it was of the great orator himself, when he delivered

one of his famous speeches. The eloquence is there, only the voice is wanting. Compare :

> "Those lips are thine,—thy own sweet smile I see,
> The same that oft in childhood solaced me;
> *Voice only fails*, else how distinct they say,
> "Grieve not my child, chase all thy fears away."
>
> *On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture.*

705-711. **PARAPHRASE**—Nor is carving the only part of the sculptor's art attended to; engraving is practised with equal care; both branches of the art are cultivated with the same assiduity. Carefully and unerringly guiding the point of his instrument the engraver traces on the copper-plate whatever forms he pleases—the most beautiful scenes or the most elegant human figures.

Bewick who gave such great impulse to the art of wood-engraving, was born in 1753, and he died in 1828. The famous engravers of Cowper's time were Hogarth (1697-1764), Woollett (1735--85), Strange (1721—92); the famous Mezzotint Earlom (1740—1822). MacArdell (1710(?)—65), John Raphæl Smith (1752--1812). Amongst foreign engravers on steel, at this time, was Raphæl Morghen (1758-1833).

705-706. **Nor does &c.**—Construe: And the chisel alone does not occupy the powers of sculpture, but the style occupies it as much. The *chisel* is the implement with which the sculptor shapes his statues. The *style* is the pointed tool of the engraver; including both the 'graver' (for thicker strokes) and the 'etching needle' (for finer writing). Most engraving is now done, not on the plate itself, but on a coating of wax, on which nitric acid is poured, which eats into the lines of drawing, and leaves an indelible mark.

Each province of her art her equal care.
With nice incisión of her guided steel
She ploughs a brazen field, and clothes a soil
So sterile, with what charms soe'er she will, 710
The richest scenery and the loveliest forms.
Where finds philosophy her eagle eye
With which she gazes at yon burning disk,
Undazzled, and detects, and counts his spots?
In London. Where her implements exact, 715
With which she calculates, computes, and scans

707. **Province**—(nom. absolute) department.

" **Her**—Refers to 'sculpture.'

708. **With nice &c.**—With incision of her unerringly guided steel.

709. **Ploughs**—Cuts the brazen surface.

A brazen field—A brass plate on which the engraving is made.

710 **Sterile**—Unproductive as hard metal.
What charms so e'er—Whatsoever charms.

711. **Scenery**—*Scenery* and *charms* indicate the two different kinds of the usual subjects of painting—*Landscape*, or *portrait*.

712-24. **PARAPHRASE**—In London, science utilizes the sun's bright disc, and discovers, and counts its spots. There, also, with nicely made instruments, she measures distances, calculates motions, and carefully examines magnitudes, at one time finding the size of an atom, at another, determining the circumference of the world. What other place of traffic is so wealthy, so crowded, exports so much, or is so well filled with merchandise as London—that rich, extensive and still increasing city? Babylon was not more famous, as the chief city of the ancient world, than London.—the pride of the more glorious world of our own times.

712. **PARAPHRASE**—An example of *Personification*. The simple application of a personal pronoun, implying *sense* to an abstract idea, or to an inanimate object, at once invests it with *personality*.

By *Philosophy*, the poet means what we call natural or physical philosophy, or physics. He is thinking especially of William Herschel (1738—1822), who was just at this time becoming famous. It was, in 1781, that he discovered Uranus.—HALES.

Eagle eye—As that which looks at the sun; the eagle being the only creature that can look at the dazzling orb without flinching. The eagle is remarkable for its far-sightedness; hence, the appropriateness of the metaphor.

712. **Philosophy**—Natural philosophy; science.

713. **Yon burning disk**—The sun.

715. **Where her implements exact**—Where *does Philosophy find* her implement, &c.

All distance, motion, magnitude, and now
Measures an atom, and now girds a world ?
In London. Where has commerce such a mart,
So rich, so throng'd, so drained, and so supplied, [720
As London—opulent, enlarged, and still
Increasing, London ? Babylon of old
Not more the glory of the earth than she,
A more accomplished world's chief glory now.

718. **Girds a world**—Determines the circumference of a planet or system of planets.

919. **London**—*London*, the metropolis of the British Empire, situated on the Thames, surpasses every other city in the world in the variety and extent of its trade and commerce, and in the wealth and enterprise of its people.

Cf. Thomson's *Seasons, Summer*, in his apostrophe to Britania :—

> "Full are thy cities with the sons of art ;
> And trade and joy in every busy street
> Mingling are heard, &c.

Wordsworth gives the whole of the Seventh Book of his *Prelude* to a picture of London, as he saw it.

720. **Drained**—Of the articles of commerce, such as provisions, coal, clothing, &c., in consequence of the great demand for them.

721. **Still increasing London**—The population of London, in 1801, when the first general census of the kingdom took place, was 865, 628 ; in 1871, it was 3,883,092. Since *The Sofa* was written, it has about *quintupled* itself !—HALES.

722-24. **PARAPHRASE**—Babylon was not more the crowning ornament of ancient times than London is of our more civilised age.

722. **Babylon, &c.**—In full :—Babylon of old *was* not more the glory of the earth, than she, a more accomplished world's chief glory now, *is the glory, &c.*

Babylon—*Babylon*, on the Euphrates, the capital of Babylonia, was regarded as one of the largest and most famous cities of ancient times. It was surrounded by a wall, 200 hundred cubits high and 50 cubits thick ; and was furnished with 100 brazen gates. It contained, among other buildings, the famous temple of Belus or Baal, called by the Arabs, Birs Nimrud ; the Old Palace, on both sides of the Euphrates ; and the New Palace, in which were the Hanging Gardens of Semiramis, which were regarded as one of the wonders of the world. The judgments of God were denounced against Babylon ; and 'the queen of nations' became 'heaps—a dwelling place for dragons, an astonishment and a hissing, without an inhabitant.' So complete was its destruction that its very site became a matter of doubt.

Babylon : "Even, in the times of Herodotus, was the first city of the world. It formed a square, each side of which was 12 geographical miles in length. Its hanging gardens were one of the seven wonders of the world. Taken by Cyrus, B. C. 538 Destined by Alexander as the capital of his empire in Asia. Now an uninhabited mass of ruins."—*English School Classics.*

722. **Babylon, &c.**—Old Babylon *was* not more the glory of the earth of her time, as London *is* now the glory of a world more civilised than the old.

723. **Not**—*Was* not.

Than she—*i.e.*, than London is.

She has her praise. Now mark a spot or two [725
That so much beauty would do well to purge;
And show this queen of cities, that so fair
May yet be foul; so witty yet not wise.

725-28. **PARAPHRASE**—Having said too much in her praise, let us now note some stains of which she ought to cleanse herself; and prove to this noblest of cities that though she is so beautiful, she may still be impure, and, though so ingenious, may yet have no true wisdom.

725. **She has her praise** — I have spoken of all for which she deserves praise.

726. **Would do well to purge**— Would find it better for her beauty if she can wipe off those spots. To *purge a spot* is rather an unusual expression. Beauty itself is to purge her spots; not a happy personification.—MORELL.

728. **So witty, &c.**—*That* so witty, *may* yet not *be* wise.

Witty means *possessed of knowledge.* Cf:—

"She so *witty* yet may not be *wise.*"

Wisdom is the right use of knowledge, and differs from it, as the right use of a faculty differs from a faculty itself.

727. **Show**—Imperative mood. Co-ordinate with *mark*,

So fair—*i.e.*, one so fair.

It is not seemly, nor of good report,
That she is slack in discipline; more prompt 730
To avenge than to prevent the breach of law:
That she is rigid in denouncing death

729-38. **PARAPHRASE**—It is not becoming, nor it is conducive to her good name that she is so remiss in preserving order; that she is readier to punish the wrong-doer than to prevent his crime; that, though she is rigorous in punishing small robberies with death, she grants to those that steal the public money, life and freedom, and often, even, rewards them with honours: and while those who steal in England are hanged, they who stuff and swell their pockets witth the plunder of Indian territories escape.

729. **It is not, &c.**—neither becoming to her position, nor good for her reputation.

730. **Slack in discipline**—Refers to the faulty police administration of the town in Cowper's time. That the mob could do as they pleased, burning down houses and gaols, for five days during the Gordon riots, does not speak very highly of the disciplinary arrangements of the town. These terms, however, do not apply to the London of the present day. The police regulations and organisations are admirable now.

731. Comp. Johnson's *London* (published in 1738.) 238—43:—

"Scarce can our fields, such crowds at Tyburn die,
With hemp the gallows and the fleet supply."

731. **Avenge the breach of law**—By inflicting heavy punishments on the criminals.

732. **She is rigid, &c.**—To cut down a tree in an orchard; to pick a person's pocket of property to the amount of 5*s*; to steal goods from a shop or house to the same amount; and even to rob a shop, &c. of articles worth more than 12*d.*, on a second conviction, were crimes for which persons were liable to death. In 1785, 97 persons were executed for shop lifting; 20 suffered together, on one occasion. Even children, under ten, were sentenced to death for this offence.

"During the first twenty years of the 19th century, the average number of persons executed in England and Wales was 84; during the eight years ending with 1857, the average was 9.—Curtis" *History of England.*

Capital punishment is now virtually abolished in England except for murder.

Hanging day—Was an established phrase. It was not till 1808 that picking pockets ceased to be a capital crime, thanks to the generous energy of Sir Samuel Romilly. Mainly through his efforts and those of his successor in the cause of mercy, and indeed of prudence, Sir James Mackintosh, the severity of our Criminal Code was gradually mitigated, but it was slow work. There were many who were still for "hanging all" (see Knight's *Popular History of England*, vol. iii. ch. iv.) "In the three years ending 1820 the executions in England and Wales amounted to 312: in the three years ending 1820 they were 178; in the three years ending 1840 they were 62—. HAYDN'S *Dictionary of Dates*. In London alone there were 43 executions in 1820.—HALES.

732. 'That she is rigid, &c.'—Cf.

(1) "One to destroy is to murder by the law,
And gibbets keep the lifted hand in awe.
To murder thousands takes a specious name."
—YOUNG, *Satire VII.*

(2) "Where little villains must submit to fate
That great ones may enjoy the world in state."
—*Dispensary*, Canto ii.

On petty robbers, and indulges life
And liberty, and oft-times honour too
To peculators of the public good. 735
That thieves at home must hang, but he, that puts
Into his overgorged and bloated purse
The wealth of Indian provinces, escapes.

733. **Indulges**—Gives *indulgently*. This is a Latinism. We do not in ordinary English speak of indulging things to people, but of indulging people with things.

This verb is usually followed by *with* or *in*. The construction in the text is unusual, but cf. :—

"The virgin ent'ring bright *indulged* the day
To the brown cave, and brush'd the dreams away."
—DRYDEN.

"Ancient privileges, *indulged* by former Kings to their people, must not, without high reason, be revoked by their successors."—JEREMY TAYLOR, *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*.

735. **Peculators** -Those who defraud the public by appropriating the money entrusted to them for public purposes. L. *peculium*, private property. The 'peculators' make *peculium* of the public money, entrusted to them.

736-38. **He that puts, &c.**—The poet here refers to Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India, whose celebrated trial began in 1786. Hastings was accused of arbitrary and tyrannical conduct; of having extorted immense sums of money; of having thus ruined many native princes; and of having been addicted to every form and degree of oppression. In 1795 the trial terminated in the acquittal of Hastings.

In Book iv. of *The Task* (lines 28-30), Cowper censures the rapacity of the East India Company; and in a letter to Mr. Unwin, dated January 3, 1784, he says: 'The potentates of this country, they (the East India Company) dash in pieces, like a potter's vessel, as often as they please, making the happiness of 30 millions of mankind a consideration subordinate

to that of their own emolument, oppressing them as often as it may serve a lucrative purpose, and, in no instance that I have ever heard of, consulting their interest and advantage."

736. **He**—A thrust at Clive who returned from India with immense wealth, and whose proceedings in India were made the subject of a Parliamentary enquiry in 1772-73." He was acquitted, but stung with the disgrace, implied in the trial, he committed suicide, 1774. This is not the only instance where Cowper attacks Clive. In his *Expostulation*, he writes.

"Hast thou, though suckled at fair Freedom's breast.
Exported slavery to the conquered East,
Pulled down the tyrants India served with dread,
And raised thyself a greater in their stead?
Gone thither armed and hungry, returned *full*,
Fed from the richest veins of the Mogul,"
&c. &c. &c.

737. **Over-gorged**—'Gorged' to excess. 'Gorge' itself denotes 'to fill to the throat.'

Bloated—Distended beyond the natural size; swollen, as with water or serum; as a '*bloated* face.'

Nor is it well, nor can it come to good,
That, through profane and infidel contempt 740
Of holy writ, she has presumed to annul
And abrogate, as roundly as she may,
The total ordinance and will of God;
Advancing Fashion to the post of Truth,

739-48. **PARAPHRASE**—Nor is it right, nor will it promote her happiness, that by irreverent, unbelieving scorn of the Bible, she has ventured to set aside, as far as she is able, the plain commands and the will of God. She has made fashion, not the truth, her guide, and given supreme authority to certain usages of her own, until religious worship on Sundays, has degenerated into mere unhonoured ceremonies, and praying has almost ceased.

739. Cf. "It is not, nor it cannot come to good."
—SHAKESPEARE'S *Hamlet*, I. 2.

740. Cf. "An infidel contempt of holy writ
Stole by degrees upon his mind."
—WORDSWORTH'S *Excursion.*

Infidel—As a substantive, one who rejects Christianity; used adjectively in the text. Der. Lat. *infidelis; fidelis* = faithful; *fides*, faith

740. **Infidel contempt**—Contempt as of an 'infidel' or unbeliever.

741. **Holy writ**—The Bible

Writ—Lat. anything written, but restricted in use to the Bible (as here) and to a *writ* issued by a court. The restriction of the word Bible (lit. a book) to the one book should here be noticed.

Annul—To render void. Synonymous with *abrogate*, and signifies do away with: 'abolish.'

741-46. **She has presumed to annul, &c.**—Of the value of Sabbath observances, Addison thus writes in his *Sir Roger de Coverley*:—'I am always very well pleased with a country Sunday, and think that if keeping holy the seventh

day were only a human institution, it would be the last method that could have been thought of for the polishing and civilizing of mankind. It is certain the country people would soon degenerate into a kind of savages and barbarians were there not such frequent returns of a stated time, in which the whole village meet together with their best faces, and in their cleanliest habits, to converse with one another upon indifferent subjects, hear their duties explained to them, and join together in adoration of the Supreme Being. Sunday clears away the rest of the whole week, not only as it refreshes in their minds the notion of religion, but as it puts both sexes upon appearing in their most agreeable forms, and exerting all such qualities as are apt to give them a figure in the eye of the village.'

742. **Abrogate**—To repeal.

As roundly as she may—As much *openly* and *boldly* as is possible for a professedly Christian city to do To do a thing *roundly* is to do it boldly and completely. The whole phrase admits of two meanings. It may mean either:—'As completely as it can be done'; or:—'As completely as it is in her power to do it.' It would appear from the *well nigh* of 748 that the latter is the meaning here. "'To rate any one *roundly*,' is to scold him not in any careful discriminating style, but promiscuously, 'at large,' and so plainly, with no mitigation. Comp. Sir Toby, "I must be *round* with you" = I must be plain-spoken, not mince matters (*Twelfth Night, II.*, iii.; so *Comedy of Errors, II.*, i., etc.); so "Your reproof is something too round."—*Henry V.*, IV. i.

743 **Ordinance**—Law or rule established by authority, (here, of the Bible.)

744. **Truth**—Here used for God's word, which is often designated *the Truth*. Giving to Fashion the authority due to God's word only. Lines 745-67 expand line 744.

Advancing &c.—The Londoner is more prone to obey the commands of fashion than the commands of truth (the Bible.)

And centering all authority in modes 745
And customs of her own, till Sabbath rites
Have dwindled into unrespected forms,
And knees and hassocks are well-nigh divorced.
God made the country, and man made the [town;
What, wonder, then that health and virtue, gifts 750

745. **Centering**—Vesting.

Modes—This word is now quite superseded by *fashion.*

745-746. **Modes...her own** -*i. e.*, fashions.

746. **Of her own**—*i.e.* laid down by herself.

Sabbath rites &c.—The usual observances of Sunday. The Sunday rites are looked upon as mere formalities. The people have no heart in them

"Cowper was what would now be called a Sabbatarian, yet even he rebelled against the ultra-Sabbatarianism of his friend, the Rev. J. Newton, who took him to task for taking walks on Sundays."—*Storr.*

747. **Have dwindled &c.** -Have become gradually of less and less importance.

748. **Hassocks**—Stuffed cushions or footstools for kneeling on, in churches. 'My friend, Sir Roger, has often told me that, at his coming to his estate, he found his parishioners very irregular; and that, in order to make them *kneel* and join in the responses, he gave every one of them a *hassock* and a common prayer book.'—ADDISON.

The meaning is either that church attendance is neglected or the devout custom of kneeling at prayers disregarded.

748. **EXPLANATION**—People do no longer kneel in prayer.

749-74. **Analysis**—*The town is human, the country divine; what wonder then that health and virtue should haunt the country? We country folk envy not you, citizens, your riches and luxuries, which are at variance with nature, and threaten the ruin of the nation.—Storr.*

749-59. **PARAPHRASE**.—Rural scenes and rural joys were created by God, but towns with their avocations and pleasures have been made by man. It is no wonder, therefore, that virtue and good health, blessings which alone can console us amidst those ills that all must bear, should be more durable in the country. I envy you not your mode of life, you, who are carried about in carriages or sedan chairs, who are wearied only with your own idleness, and who never gaze on nature's scenes. Continue to enjoy your pleasures still! It is only in towns that you can appear to advantage; it is only while among people as depraved as yourselves that you are harmless. (Rural joys are not for such as you.)

749. **God &c.**—This is an oft-quoted line. The poet here means to say that towns are the products of human necessity, whereas the country existed all along. Cowper is quite right if he means only this; but he seems to suggest that the country, being divine, is the abode of virtue and that the town, being human, is the hot-bed of vice. This position is hardly defensible.

750. **What wonder then &c.**—There is nothing to be surprised at, if &c

That can alone make sweet the bitter draught
That life holds out to all, should most abound
And least be threatened in the fields and groves?
Possess ye therefore, ye who, borne about
In chariots and sedans, know no fatigue 755
But that of idleness, and taste no scenes
But such as art contrives, possess ye still
Your element; there only ye can shine,
There only minds like yours can do no harm.
Our groves were planted to console at noon 760

751. **Draught**—Noun from 'drink.' Beware of confounding it with *drought* (from 'dry.')

That can alone, &c.—Without which life, which to all is hard enough, is not tolerable. The notion of one's life or lot being represented by a cup or draught is a very common one.

753. **Least be threatened, &c.**—This must be acceded to. In the country, the causes of bad health and the temptations to vice are certainly fewer than they are in the town.

In the fields and groves—*i.e.*, in the country.

With reference to Cowper's assumption that health belongs more to the country than to the town it may be remarked that London is an exceptionally healthy place.

754. **Possess**—Hold undisputed possession of. We, country people, do not covet your holding.

755. **Chariots and sedans**—'Chariots' were four-wheeled pleasure or state carriages having only one seat, and not the 'cars' of antiquity. *Sedans* were a kind of covered chair for one person, carried on the shoulders of two bearers; so called from Sedan, a town in France where they were first manufactured.

756. **But**—*Except*, and is a preposition.

755-756. **No fatigue but that of idleness**—The weariness of having nothing to do. Burke in a remarkable passage in the 'French Revolution' speaks of the *over laboured lassitude* of the rich and idle. There is a kind of oxymoron here, *i.e.*, there is the close connection of two opposite ideas, fatigue and idleness. In the usual form of the figure an adjective is applied as an epithet to a noun of contrary meaning as in Tennyson's 'faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.' So, Burke has 'insolent tenderness.'

And taste, &c.—*And who* taste, &c. Is used in the old sense of, appreciate.

757. **Still**—Always.

758. **Your element**—*viz.*, the town (as distinguished from the country.)—A person's *element* is that place or condition, in which he is particularly at home—in other words that which is peculiarly suited to him. That without which one cannot live; as water is the element of fish. This word has rather a sarcastic significance. The city-bred man cannot live out of town, for he is there like a fish out of water. Your natural or habitual abode.

Shine—Make a figure.

759. **EXPLANATION**—It is so bad there already that you cannot make it worse—but in any other place you would do harm. As severe a sentence on the city and its inhabitants as could well be passed.

Can do no harm—Being absorbed in pleasures.

760-68. **PARAPHRASE**—The groves of the country woods were intended to refresh with their shade, the thoughtful rambler at noon. At evening the moonlight, gliding between the motionless leaves, yields him all the light he desires, and he wants no other music than that of the warbling birds. We, dwellers in the country do not want your brilliant lamps, for they only obscure the milder light of the moon; we do not want your songs, for they only confuse those of the more melodious rural songsters. The thrush, frightened at your music, flies away, and the nightingale is indignantly silent.

The pensive wand'rer in their shades. At eve
The moonbeam, sliding softly in between
The sleeping leaves, is all the light they wish,
Birds warbling all the music. We can spare
The splendour of your lamps, they but eclipse 765
Our softer satellite. Your songs confound

761. **Pensive**—Thoughtful; given to meditation. From Lat. *pendo*, to weigh, but direct from the Fr. *pensif*, thoughtful, subdued; also, oppressed with melancholy; as in *Il Penseroso* where Milton, addressing 'divinest Melancholy,' says

> "Come, *pensive* nun, devout and pure,
> Sober, steadfast, and demure."

Compare the word with *ponder*, and observe how, in both cases, the physical meaning of weight has been transferred to express the state of the mind when it is, as it were, weighed down with sorrow or thought.

763. **The sleeping leaves**—In the absence of any breeze, the leaves are still and appear to be sleeping in the moonbeam.

They—*i.e.* the leaves.

They wish—*Which* they wish. An Adj. sentence to *light*.

764. **Birds warbling**—Nom. Abs.

Spare—Do without.

765. **The splendour of your lamps** — The splendid lights of the town.

But—Only, and is an adv. modifying the verb *eclipse*.

They but, &c.—Your bright lamps while they throw into the shades our more modest light (the moon) give us nothing in return. In the same way your music drowns our more pleasing strains.

Eclipse—Darken; throw a shadow over, as in an eclipse.

766. **Satellite**—Lat. *satelles, satellitis*, an attendant. This word means literally an attendant, a life-guard, and is applied first to a planet revolving round another, as the moon; secondly to a hanger on.

The moon is the satellite of the earth, and she shines only by means of the *sun's light* which is *reflected* from the surface. The light of the moon is weaker and softer than that of the sun. It has been estimated that the *light of the full moon is three hundred thousand times weaker than sunlight*. Milton thus writes of the light of the moon :—

> "*Less* bright the moon,
> But opposite in levell'd west was set,
> His mirror : with full face borrowing her light
> From him."—*Par. Lost*, *VII*. 375.

The word *softer* here qualifies, 'light' implied. They but eclipse the softer (light) of our satellite. Satellite is not compared with another body of the same kind, but with the lamps of a city through their common property of lightgiving.

Softer satellite—The moon whose rays are milder than the light of incandescent gas burners.

Confound—Confuse, render indistinguishable.

Our more harmonious notes. The thrush departs
Scared, and th' offended nightingale is mute.
There is a public mischief in your mirth;
It plagues your country. (Folly such as yours, 770
Graced with a sword, and worthier of a fan,
Has made, what enemies could ne'er have done,
Our arch of empire, steadfast but for you,
A mutilated structure, soon to fall.)

767. **Our more harmonious notes**—The songs of the birds. McLellan, an American poet, thus writes of the birds:—

> "Their tones
> Are, sweeter than the music of the lute,
> Or the harp's melody, or the notes that gush
> So thrillingly from beauty's ruby lips."

Thrush—*The thrush* is a sweet songster, and most delightfully mingles in the concert of the groves. He begins to sing as early as February, and is known by the name of thrush, throstle, and mavis.—McLEOD.

768. **Scared**—Frightened, as at something hideous. Those who have a taste for music are annoyed at the performance of ignorant musicians. Hence both the thrush and the nightingale—nature's musicians—are offended at the discordant notes of the music of the townspeople, and the thrush leaves the place altogether, while the nightingale does not sing at all. (This is Cowper's explanation as to why the thrush and the nightingale are not to be heard in towns.)

769-74. **PARAPHRASE**—Your gaiety is mischievous to the public; it troubles your country. Coxcombs like you, who have taken up the sword, when only fitted to handle a fan, have done what our enemies would never have been able to do; you have weakened and brought to the verge of destruction our empire, which, but for your folly, would now have been firmly established.

769. **Public mischief in your mirth**—You make yourselves merry in towns, and, thereby, ruin the country. Your merriment is of such a kind that it harms the general weal. It is because you are such frivolous effeminate fops that the power of England has degenerated.

770. **Plagues**—smites, is destructive to. Latin *plaga* a blow, Gr. *plege.*

Folly such, &c.—Folly such as yours *is*, graced with a sword, &c.

Folly such as yours, &c.—This was written when the American Colonies were achieving their independence. Cowper looked on this as a fatal blow to the British Empire, and considered it as due to the negligence or incompetence of the officers conducting the war. In Bk. IV, l. 5-7, he writes

> "—Have our troops awaked?
> Or do they still, as if with opium drugg'd,
> Snore to the murmurs of th' Atlantic wave?"

771. **Graced with a sword**—Which is more effeminate than manlike. A sword was a part of the full dress of every gentleman in Cowper's time. (It is still retained in 'Court dress.') And the fan was a part of a lady's dress. Cowper is irritated at the loss of the colonies; and he says that the generals were more fit to carry a fan in their hands than to grasp a sword. Comp. *Table Talk*, *194—195*.

Worthier of a fan—*i. e.*, a fan, woman's appendage would be a more fitting decoration of such folly than a sword.

> "Generals who will not conquer when they may,
> *Firm friends to peace, to pleasure and good pay.*"

771—74. **EXPLANATION**—Such folly as you have shewn—you, who, though called men are but women in courage—have done—what enemies could never have done,—undermined and hastened the destruction of our empire, which would be firm but for your effeminacy.

773. **Arch of Empire**—The power of the country is compared on account of its strength to an arch.

Steadfast—Lit., *fast* in the *stead*, or place, hence firm.

Steadfast but for you—Which was steadfast (firm) and would have continued so, had it not been for you.

774. **Mutilated**—Partially destroyed, deprived of its most important parts. The mutilation referred to of course the loss of the American Colonies.

A mutilated structure—A house pulled down in part; to *mutilate* is to remove a limb. 'Structure' is the object of 'has made.'

Soon to fall—Alluding to the American War of Independence, which was going on at the time, and which Cowper, in common with many others, thought would end in the destruction of the British Empire. *Soon to fall* is adjectival to 'structure.''

The gist of the passage seems to be that town life enervated the generals entrusted with the conduct of the American war, and the result was that the British empire lost an important limb.

Gloomy predictions of this sort, which frequently occur in Cowper, show the desponding state of his mind. They are the dark shadows thrown over a fine intellect by those ever-rising mists and clouds of mental disease, with which he had to struggle almost throughout life, and which finally closed upon him for ever.

Before Book I. was brought entirely into its present finished state, Cowper thus wrote of it on the 3rd August 1783, to the Rev. W. Bull:—'The *Sofa* is ended, but not finished; a paradox which your natural acumen, sharpened by habits of logical attention, will enable you to reconcile in a moment. Do not imagine, however, that I lounge over it; on the contrary I find it severe exercise to mould and fashion it to my mind.'

THE SOFA.



Model Questions with Answers.

THE SOFA.

Model Questions with Answers.

1. Q.—What is the origin of the Sofa ?

A.—*Vide* Introduction p. 20.

2. Q.—Trace Cowper's history of it.

A.—"The hardy chief upon the rugged rock
Reposed his weary length"

would go to shew, according to Cowper, a period of primitive simplicity, in which the use of furniture was unknown. But with the advance of civilization, the inventive genius of man was not slow to contrive some sort of elevated seat, just to raise himself a bit high from the snow-clad soil and the level of the lower animals. The early history of furniture was marked by the advent of the joint-stool, consisting of either a square or round massive slab and three legs, upholding that ponderous seat upon which such mighty a personage as the 'Immortal Alfred' would not hesitate to sit. In due course of time. this curious article of furniture underwent a happy transformation. The tripod got quadrupled, in the matter of the legs, and the naked 'massy slab' was draped in rich colours and fine embroidery. The introduction of cane from India, that enjoyed a natural varnish, soon replaced the wooden slab, and there sprang into existence a seat that proved rather slippery and tall. A corpulent Alderman of Cripplegate is credited to have lent it the elbows. Another ingenious mechanic rendered it a two-seated furniture in compliance with the demands of the fair sex—

United yet divided, twain at once,
So sit two kings of Brentford on the throne :
And so two citizens who take the air,
Close pack'd and smiling in a chaise and one."
Things excellent are of slow growth !

N.B.—This peculiar seat was followed by the chair, and the latter by the luxurious sofa, in the fulness of time.

3. Q.—Describe Cowper's ramble as a schoolboy when he had hardly any need of the sofa.

A.—Cowper was passionately fond of Nature even in his boyhood. He would not hesitate to play the truant, traverse far beyond the prescribed limits of his seminary, plunge into deep valleys, climb remote riverbrinks or ascend distant hills to pay his homage to her. In these pilgrimages to her sacred shrines, the keen appetite of his youth would fast consume his pocket store, and turn, for its satisfaction, to such wild fruits as the crimson crab, the black-berry or the austere sloe which Cowper calls

"Hard fare! but such as boyish appetite disdains not,
Nor the palate, undepraved by culinary arts, unsavoury deems."

Cowper bears unstinted testimony to the recuperative energy of youth in the following lines:

"Youth repairs
His wasted spirits quickly, by long toil
Incurring short fatigue;"

4. Q.—What was Cowper's idea of solitude, and what gave it a rude shock?

A.—Poets are, at one and the same time, lovers and products of solitude. In his excursions in the country, Cowper lights upon a solitary cottage, on a hill-top, concealed in a bower of the Elm. The poet envies its secluded site, reflects on the prospective residence, in that temple, of peace that seemed to promise complete immunity from the vexation of the town or the village, and to afford an appropriate closet for poetic contemplation. The closer inspection of the temporal disadvantages of the place decides him in favour of the more refined modes of civic and social life when he exclaims:

"So farewell envy of the peasant's nest,
If solitude make scant the means of life,
Society for me!

5. Q.—Describe the "weather-house" and shew how the following two lines are illustrated by the poet's own habits of life.

A.—"Fearless of humid air and gathering rains
Forth steps the man—an emblem of myself."

In wet weather, while ladies' feet would be deemed too delicate for the mire, and they would not cross the precincts of the snug and comfortable drawing-room, Cowper would think it worth his while to start on excursions through hitherto unexplored regions of Nature, and discover places of novelty and interest alike, much resembling the figure of the man in the weather-house, that contained both a masculine and feminine figure that would alternately appear outside to the infinite amusement of the spectators, in accordance with the change of the weather, fair or foul – the fair one coming out to meet the fair weather, and her mate, to face the foul.

6. Q.—Criticise Cowper's view of the relative values of the town and the country life.

A.—Both in the Task and in his Letters, there is one topic to which Cowper continually recurs—it is the praise of retirement or country-life. Both his prose and poetry are redolent of love and the domestic health. "God made the country, man made the town," says the poet in the Task, but he seems to forget that the town and the country are interdependent. The town draws its sap from the country, the country clothes its bare body with the products of the town. Crimes are fewer in villages, only because the population is fewer, and the interests of the village people are less complex and varied than those of the town folk. Health and virtue are not the exclusive possession of the country, nor are ill-health and vice confined to cities. The townbred man of fashion can enjoy the sweets of nature more than the peasant who lives in their midst, and perceiving them at all hours, does not understand their proper value. The thought of finding bread for himself and family, absorbs the peasant's mind completely, and deadens in him all sense of enjoying the "feast" of Nature. The poet wishes the "peasant's nest," to be his visit still, but never his "abode." Why? The want of the daily necessaries of life scares away the votary

of Nature. He cannot live "dependent on the baker's punctual call," and without the "sweet waters of the crystal well." It is the human nature in him which prompts him to say farewell to the "peasant's nest," and to choose, for his residence, a spot where his necessities may be more conveniently supplied. The man who can concede this much to himself has no ground to tax his wealthier fellows for choosing richer cities for their residence. He who advocates living in a cultured society, where man has learnt "the manners and the arts of *civil* life," can by no means ignore the city which teaches him the manners he approves of, and supplies him the products of the arts he wants either for use or ornament. It is wealth, and not the city, that breeds luxury and the attendant evil propensities. It is hardly fair, therefore, to hold the city responsible for such things. If the city people grow less orthodox, it is the trend of human thought that makes them so. In this case the city only takes the lead, and the contagion soon spreads into the country whose groves can hardly barricade the entrance of the feeling inside.

7. Q.—Criticise Cowper's estimate of the relative values of Nature and Art.

A.—Cowper says:—Nature is divine, and Art is human and as such, Nature is superior to Art. "Imitative strokes can do no more than please the eye—but sweet nature, every sense." Art can be enjoyed only by the rich, while Nature is free to all. All this is very true. But the poet seems to overlook the fact that the book of Nature can be read only by the initiated; whereas the productions of Art please all eyes. Art is the more fascinating as it approaches *Nature*, and Nature the more charming as she is *artistically* arranged. Nature is attractive to the imaginative mind, because she is a painting to him. Nature is God's *art*; and none but those gifted with a modicum of the divine eye, can enjoy it. To the man with a devout heart, who would see his Creator's fingers in the nice arrangement of the fibres, they are no doubt as charming as ever. But until this spirit become an inseparable accident of humanity, it is idle to expect a universal preference of Nature to Art. The art that "gives Chatham's eloquence to marble lips," gives infinitely greater delight to all, than the great orator himself ever gave to a few. Nature cannot be understood without art, nor can there be any art without nature. If you

are pleased with "Italian lights" on "English walls," you have a faculty for the perception of the charm; and that faculty is *no less divine* than nature herself. Preference, therefore, there should be none. Each has a value of its own.

8. Q.—What is meant by the statement that "the Task has no regular plan"? Does the want of a plan affect the moral of the poem?

A.—In a letter to Mrs. Unwin, dated Oct. 10, 1784, Cowper writes of his *Task*. "If the work cannot boast of a regular plan (in which respect however I do not think it altogether indefensible), it may yet boast that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, etc." Less poetic minds, however, wonder what the poet is driving at. He begins with the *Sofa* and ends with putting a fan in the hands of the English generals, who failed to bring the American war to a successful issue. The intermediate links are rural scenes, rural sounds—woods, forests, rivers, woods—crazy Kate and gipsies and Omai—cemented with attacks on card-playing, gambling, and a gay city life. The poet's claim of a slight connection between them is hardly justifiable. But does this want of a regular plan affect the merit of the book? Not at all. The reader rather delights to hear the poet sing on various topics. He is never dull or monotony. The variety of his subjects invests them with a charm which is irresistible. He takes the reader in his company, and walks along with him, chatting all the way on whatever happens to fall within the range of his vision. He describes everything minutely, adds his own reflections, and expects his companion to share in his joys, and sympathise with his feelings. All this he does, not with the pride of an autocrat, but with the frankness and earnestness of a friend, which serves to draw the reader closer to his side. His remarks may not harmonise with the feelings of his readers, but they are never offensive. The reader of his descriptions is pleased with the narrative, and is hungry for more. It was for this that Lamb wrote to Coleridge, "I am glad you love Cowper. I could forgive a man for not enjoying Milton; but I would not call that man my friend, who should be offended with '*the divine chit-chat of Cowper*.'"

9. Q.—What were Cowper's views on the necessity and benefits of Exercise?

A.—The honest and innocent toil of the thresher evokes Cowper's reflections on the utility of exercise. The primal curse that man must live by the sweat of his brow seems to have proved to his advantage; toil maintains the human constitution in health and spirits, and brightens it up even in the last stage of decay. It is by ceaseless motion that the universe holds its own, and it is by constant energising that man must acquire strength and vigour.

> "Oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams,
> All feel the fresh'ning impulse, and are cleansed
> By restless undulation: ev'n the oak
> Thrives by the rude concussion of the storm:

It is the energetic and active frame that can enjoy sweet slumber at night and not the indolent that roll in 'silken sloth' in quest of ease that, like a coy maiden, when courted most, 'farthest retires.'

10. Q.—Compare Nature and Art in the light of the poet.

A.—Art is but a counterfeit of nature The one is only the imitation of the other—a lifeless likeness on paper or canvass of a living and moving body, rippling with visible sensations that delight, and charm the senses. Art may, indeed, bring within our reach the portrait of Nature as she looks under different skies and suns, but that portrait differs as vastly as the inanimate photograph of an animate person does from the person himself. The life-like motions, the curves and dimples, the expressions and sensations of the living organism are absent from the inanimate canvass; absent, also, are the life and music that delight the eye and soothe the ear according to Cowper.

11. Q.—Who are the really gay?

A.—"The innocent are gay—the lark is gay,

* * * * * * *

> The peasant, too, a witness of his song,
> Himself a songster, is as gay as he."

Those that are pinned down to a noon-day bed, after a night's dissipation, are certainly not gay, nor those from whom Nature exacts heavy penalties for mischief-making, nor gamesters

> "...... Whose haggard eyes
> Flash desperation, and betray their pangs
> For property stripped off, by cruel chance." [ll. 501-3.]

12. Q.—What do you know of Kate, the Gipsies and Omai, the South Sea Islander, as pictured to himself by the poet on his return from England to his Island home?

A—Poor Kate had been a serving maid whose

> "...... cloak of satin trimm'd
> With lace, and hat with splendid ribbon bound"
> [ll. 535-6.]

is evidence of her employment under some wealthy and opulent mistress. She fell in love with a young man who subsequently went to sea. The long separation drove the love-sick maiden to a state of insanity. Poor thing! She adopted the ways of a wanderer, and preferred the wilderness to any human habitation, over which she would roam at random, indulge in deep reveries about the man she had loved to infatuation, weep, and smile alternately, as she would fancy she was witnessing his pangs in foreign climes or experiencing the joy of his anticipated return. When the report of his death reached her, she sank into a state of reticence; her lunacy assumed a form of indifference to either food or shelter, and it was marked by one idiosyncracy only, viz. that of begging 'idle pins' of strangers that she met, and collecting them in the sleeves of her gown.

The Gypsies are a wandering tribe, of supposed Indian origin. Cunning, deceptive and thievish, they prefer a life of trickery and fraud, of sloth and barbarity to one of honesty and virtue, industry and civilization. They live on filthy diet exposed to all the rigours of climate and the hardships of existence, and in a state of wilful brutalization, although the amelioration of their lot by organised labour is within easy reach of accomplishment. The only redeeming features of

the class are the health and gaiety of heart they enjoy. And breathing the wholesome air and wandering much, they

> "Need other physic none to heal the effects
> Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold." [ll. 590-1.]

Omai hailed from the Sandwitch Islands, re-discovered by Captain Cook. He was brought over to London, in kind return for the friendly services he had accorded to the English, as an interpreter between his people and them. He was shown all the sights of London, treated to music, and all the pleasures of English social life—including the luxuries of London—and ultimately sent back to his Island-home, rich in cocoa and palm, at a period of his stay in England when he had just been inoculated with notions of English taste, polish and refinement. Never did a British vessel visit his Island, and Cowper pictures to himself poor Omai, day after day, from dawn till dusk, expectantly watching a sail, and asking "of the surge that bathes thy (his) foot if ever it has wash'd our (England's) distant shore" and, disappointed, retiring to his cabin and shedding the tears of a patriot at the forlorn state of his native Island.

13. Q.—What were Cowper's remarks against England in connection with Omai? Are they justifiable?

A.—Cowper characterises England with selfishness in her dealings with foreign countries, and as incapable of doing disinterested good.

> "........Doing good.
> Disinterested good, is not our trade,
> We travel far, 'tis true, but not for nought,
> And must be bribed to compass earth again
> By other hopes, and richer fruits than yours." [ll. 673-7.]

Whatever may be the state policy of England, private philanthropic missions from that illustrious Island to the remotest corners of the globe have been too numerous to be counted. Both the civilized and the uncivilized world owe a great deal of amelioration of their social condition to the initiatives and exertions of that country. The reform of prisons, and the abolition of the Negro slavery are the emanations of the English self-sacrifice. No other country in the world has done so much to enlighten, emancipate, and rationalise their fellow-men as Englishmen have done.

14. Q.—What is Cowper's idea of civilized life as favourable to the growth of virtue ?

A.—The insurmountable difficulty in the way of the growth of virtue in an uncivilized society is the absence from it of law and order; as a consequences the population is characterised by the grossest selfishness that impels them to fight with neighbouring tribes in pursuance of the unfair doctrine of "might is right." The arts of life not existing, crimes are often committed, and vices indulged in, without restraint, for the gratification of the appetite, both for food and pleasure. On the other hand, a civilized society, with every facility for culture, the arts of life, the law to protect person and property and to punish crimes, is favourable to the growth of virtue and the elevation of man.

15. Q.—Describe London in the days of Cowper; what comes in for his praise, and what for his censure ?

A.—London might be proud of a painter like Reynolds, a sculptor like Bacon, of its achievements in the domain of astronomy, of the stupendity of its commerce, but it could hardly boast of either public or private morals. It witnessed the absurd spectacle of the execution of petty wrong-doers while it did not hesitate to connive at the spoliation of the public purse. The Sabbath found itself more honoured by its violation than by its observance. The pulpit found itself subordinated to fashion, and virtue, replaced by all that would choke it. It excelled Babylon of old, not only in opulence and grandeur but also in the perpetration of those vices that slowly eat into the vitals of a nation.

16. Q.—What is Cowper's view of the city life in comparison with that in the country ?

A.—If there is anything in the world to enliven the brief span of human existence, to cheer the spirits, and elevate the soul, it is the country which is embellished with charms that nature lavishes upon her with a liberal hand. If artifice forms part of the sights and sounds of the city, the artless simplicity of nature marks every stage of enjoyment that the country offers. The thrush and the nightingale supply its music, the moon, its illuminant and the sweet breeze, its

breath, in contrast with the harmony that instruments produce, the light that street lamps afford, and the unwholesome fluid that crowded saloons do emit.

17. Q.—What are Cowper's reflections on the influence of civic dissipation on the state ?

A.—The mirth of the city spreads like a contagion into the country with every likelihood of deteriorating the race and landing it into a state of degeneracy, prejudicial to the maintenance of an empire as vast as that of England.

18. Q.—What was Cowper's aim in undertaking the Sofa ?

A.—Cowper's own words suffice for the answer: "My principal purpose is to allure the reader by character, by scenery, by imagery, and such poetical embellishments, to the reading of what may profit him; subordinately to this to combat that predilection in favour of a metropolis that beggars and exhausts the country by evacuating it of all its principal inhabitants and collaterally, and as far as is consistent with this double intention, to have a stroke at vice, vanity, and folly, wherever I find them."

19. Q.—What were Cowper's notions on music ?

A.—Music, as produced by art, is but a vain imitation of the harmony of nature, that is sweet, captivating—nay transcendental. The roaring of the mighty winds, of the distant flood, the murmur of the gentle rill, the softer music of the warblers of the wood, had delights for the poet's ear that no melody, produced by the nice-fingered art could excel. Nay even such harsh musicians of nature, as the jay, the rook, the kite, and, above all, the screeching owl, have charms for him.

> "......heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns
> And only there." [ll. 208-9.]

20. Q.—What is Cowper's view of Nature as the nurse of a serene temperament?

A.—Cowper's idea is that the spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns. Nature casts aside the gloominess of the mind, elevates the spirits, and lends to them a cheerfulness and hilarity that seldom fall to the lot of those that prefer the stale monotony of the hall or the saloon and the repetition of amusements that have shorn themselves of their novelty and freshness.

21. Q.—Why does Cowper recommend change of scene?

A.—The poet is not very far from being correct when he asserts that

> "The earth was made so various that the mind
> Of desultory man, studious of change,
> And pleased with novelty, might be indulged."

The human mind pines for a newer and richer scenery of nature, delights in the discovery of the fresh realms of wonder and charm, and, in their enjoyment. The poet is of opinion, that a brief absence from a favourite scene, rendered familiar by long acquaintance, only enhances its endearment, and the appreciation of its beauty.

> Cf. Then snug enclosures in the shelter'd vale,
> Where frequent hedges intercept the eye,
> Delight us, happy to renounce a while,
> Not senseless of its charms, what still we love,
> That such short absence may endear it more,
> Then forests, or the savage rock may please,
> That hides the sea-mew in his hollow clefts,
> Above the reach of man, etc.

22. Q.—What are the glimpses of society you catch in the Sofa?

A.—In spite of the brilliant men of his age, civic life was corrupt, and both public and private morals were contaminated with vice. Religion was a minor factor; society was in the vehement pursuit of pleasure, and men and women, victims of the maladies that unbridled dissipation should generate.

Integrity in political life was of little consequence. Criminality of the pettiest form was punished with death, although offences, of the most reprehensible nature, committed by personages of political note, would come in for no retribution. Art and commerce flourished, the former at the cost of Nature and the lovely sentiments that alliance with her inspires.

23. Q.—Quote passages from your text, illustrating Cowper's love of Nature.

A.—For an exhaustive and elaborate treatment of the subject, the student is referred to our Introduction, Pages 10, 14, 17, and 19. In this connection, also quote.

(1) "For I have loved the rural walk through lanes
Of grassy swarth, close cropp'd by nibbling sheep,
And skirted thick with intertexture firm
Of thorny boughs: have loved the rural walk
O'er hills, through valleys, and by river's brink,
E'er since a truant boy I pass'd my bound
T'enjoy a ramble on the banks of the Thames."
(ll. 109-115.)

(2) Thou knows't my praise of nature most sincere.
* * * *
* * * *
Praise justly due to those that I describe.
(ll. 150-180.)

24. Q.—"The Task was born of a potent inspiration" Explain and amplify.

A.—See our Introduction, P. 23 (Occasion).

25. Q.—Quote instances of Cowper's fondness for Latin derivatives. What other English authors show a similar taste?

A.—Instances of Cowper's fondness for Latinism:

I.. 1. *I sing the Sofa*—This is after Virgil.
I.. 31. *Vermicular*—for "*as of a worm.*"
I.. 31. *Induced*—for *brought on.*
I.. 34. *Sublime*—for *magnificent.*

L. 73. *Fancy*—for *Phantasy* or *imagination.*

L. 145. *This twentieth winter*—for "*have perceived for twenty years.*"

L. 144 *Who*—for *those who.*

By the English authors fond of high-sounding Latin polysyllables Milton, Johns on and Macaulay are also worth mention. But Cowper's Latinised style arises partly from his playfulness and sense of humour.

26. Q.—" Cowper is an apostle of sensibility"—Explain and amplify. What is this sentimentalism due to ?

A. -" In his writings generally, but especially in *The Task*, Cowper is, by his general tone, an apostle of sensibility. *The Task* is a perpetual protest not only against the fashionable vice and the irreligion but against the hardness of the world...... Among the most tangible characteristics of this special sensibility is the tendency of its brimming love of humankind to overflow upon animals."

Cf. *The Task* :—

> " I would not enter on my list of friends
> (Though graced with polished manners and fine sense,
> Yet wanting sensibility) the man
> Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm."

" Of Cowper's sentimentalism (to use the word in a neutral sense) part flowed from his own temperament, part was Evangelical, but part belonged to an element which was European." It will also be remembered in this connection that Cowper was a reader and admirer of Rousseau.

27. Q.—Give a summary of the chief events in Cowper's life, and the date of the publication of the " Task ".

A.—Born at Berkhamstead, Nov. 26,1731.

Loses his mother when a mere boy of 6 years of age, 1637.
Is sent to school at Markyate School, 1737.
Enters Westminster School, 1641.
Enters the Middle Temple, 1748.
His first attack of despondency, 1753 or 1754.
Is called to the bar, 1754.
Loses his father, 1756.

Removes to the Inner Temple, 1759.
Becomes a clerk of the Journals of the House of Lords, 1763.
Is confined in a lunatic asylum at St. Albans, 1763.
Removes to Huntingdom, 1765.
Becomes an inmate of Mr. Unwin's house, 1765.
Settles at Olney, 1767.
Is deranged for the third time, 1773.
Publication of the "Olney Hymns", 1779.
,, of the first volume of Poems, 1782.
,, of the "Task" 1784.
Is deranged for the fourth time, 1787.
Publishes his translation of Homer, 1791.
Loses Mrs. Unwin, 1769.
Dies peacefully on 25th April, 1800.

28. Q.—What was Cowper's main object in writing the *Task*?

A.—*Vide* Answer to Question 18.

29. Q.—What are the three kinds of Satire, and which is best suited to Cowper's genius?

A.—There are three kinds of satire :—(1) The Stoical, (2) The Cynical, and (3) the Epicurean. The Stoical satire consists in strenuous hatred of vice and wrong. Of this class, Juvenal is the type. The Cynical satire springs rom a bitter contempt of humanity. Swift's Gulliver is an example of this class. The Epicurean satire, though it has at its bottoma slight contempt of humanity, holds up to ridicule the follies and vanities of mankind. Horace may be mentioned as the type of this clss. It is to this Horatian kind that Cowper's genius was best suited.

30. Q.—"Cowper," writes Mr. Goldwin Smith, "is by his general tone, an apostle of sensibility." Explain and illustrate the statement.

A.—One of the characteristics of Cowper was his excessive shyness which rendered him totally unfit for the battle of life, and, as a natural result of this feeling, that morbid sensibility which made him think that he was being harshly

treated by the world. His school life, his resignation of Parliamentary clerkship and his passionate love of retirement and seclusion are the illustrations in point. *The Task* is a perpetual protest not only against the fashionable vices and the irreligion of the times, but against the hardness of the world. Among the most tangible characteristics of this special sensibility was the tendency of Cowper's brimming love of humankind to overflow upon animals. Another manifestation of this gentle sensibility was his friendly attitude towards the poor and his sympathy with their hardships and sorrows.

31. Q.—Point out the special characteristics of Cowper as a poet.

A.—*Vide* Introduction page 14-16.

32. Q.—Sketch the condition of society in Cowper's day.

A.—*Vide* Introduction page 7.

33. Q.—What was Cowper's attitude towards Science ?

A.—Cowper looks upon the pretensions of scientific men as vain and foolish. He regards them as mere bubbles and airy reveries. He laughs at the geologists 'who drill and bore the solid earth' and give us the date of the creation of the world by examining its strata. To him, astronomy and physical science have nothing but hollow and false wisdom. The one scales the heavens and gives us the reasons of the stars being fixed or planetary ; and the other wields the elements, analyses the air and authoritatively dictates laws to us. The experiments of scientific men are but 'playing tricks with nature.' His idea is that man should not unravel the mysteries of this universe 'by strides of human wisdom.' The more we learn of nature, the more we overlook her author and turn atheists. It is only the Gospel and not science which can dispel all our doubts and reveal eternal truths to us.

34. Q.—Describe Cowper as a poet.

A.—Cowper as a poet was highly original. He was a born poet and not made. His style was the outcome of his nature. A man like him could never have run in the old ruts of his predecessors. There was in him that manly independence of character which made it simply impossible that he should become a copyist of others. His delineations of the heart are all from his own experience, not one of them borrowed from books ; or in the least degree conjectural.

The tender care with which he has studied her in her various aspects is sufficient indication of his deep love for her, illustrated as it is so frequently in his poems by exquisitely beautiful verses. As for instance, in describing the play of light and shade under the "graceful arch" he says :—

> " The chequered earth seems restless as a flood
> Brushed by the wind. So sportive is the light
> Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,
> Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,
> And dark'ning and enlight'ning, as the leaves
> Play wanton, every moment, every spot."
>
> The Task, ll. 344-349.

Cowper like Tennyson loved nature of the well-ordered and well-regulated kind rather than the nature of mountains and rocks and shaggy forests. He found pleasure in the trim avenue, the carefully tended garden, the sheltered walk, the wilderness with its "well-rolled" paths. So in writing of his visit to Hayley at Eartham he says, " The cultivated appearance of Weston suits my frame of mind far better than wild hills that aspire to be mountains, covered with vast unfrequented woods and here and there affording a peep between their summits at the distant ocean. Within doors all was hospitality and kindness, but the scenery would have its effect ; and though delightful in the extreme to those who had spirits to bear it was too gloomy for me."

35. Q.—Compare Cowper and Wordsworth.

A.—Though Cowper like Wordsworth was a reverent student of Nature's love, he never thought, like him, of idealizing her as a power that may enable us to see into

the life of things and of listening for her hidden voices. He depicts her outward features with loving fidelity, but sees no soul behind them. The only spiritual significance Nature has for him is that she affords a proof of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. At the same time he approaches nearer to Wordsworth's idealism than such a writer as Thomson did, who merely reproduces her picturesque effects. He can contemplate her as a whole, and in one passage at least in his poetry we find a flash of still profounder imaginative insight. For the solitary man, he tells us, not only animals but shrubs and trees have speech easy to be understood, and then follows this couplet :—

> After long drought, when rains abundant fall,
> He hears the herbs and flowers rejoicing all.

The latter line of it almost startingly reminds us of the great poet of nature.

36. Q.—What was the origin of the Task? What is Cowper's principal object in the Task?

A.—Being hardpressed by his friend Lady Austen to write a poem in blank verse, Cowper asked her to give him a subject to write upon. Whereupon she said that he could write on any subject, for instance, the sofa, he was sitting upon. Hence the whole poem was called *The Task*, as being a task imposed upon him.

For his principal object, see Answer to Question 18.

37. Q.—What was Lady Hesketh's criticism of the Task? How did Cowper answer it?

A.—Lady Hesketh had informed Cowper that his style was sometimes unequal, less elevated in some parts than others : to which Cowper replied that when the subject he was dealing with was commonplace, a lofty style would be incongruous.

38. Q.—What does Cowper himself say about 'The Task'? How does he absolve himself against the charge that it is devoid of any systematic plan?

A.—Neither does Cowper imitate anybody nor does he affectedly differ. His delineations of the heart are from

his own experience : not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. His descriptions are all from Nature : not one of them second-hand. In his numbers, which he has varied as much as possible he has imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance.

As regards the charge of having no plan in *The Task*, he points out that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage. He has introduced his best impressions and what is of a religious cast towards the end of the book, so that he might not offend the reader at his entrance.

39. Q.—Explain and illustrate what is meant when it is said "Though Cowper, like Wordsworth, was a reverent student of Nature's love, he never thought like him."

A.—Though Cowper, like Wordsworth, was a reverent student of Nature's love, he never thought, like him, of idealizing her as a power that may enable us to see into the life of things and of listening to her hidden voices. He depicts her outward features with loving fidelity. To Cowper Nature is simply a beautiful background, a space where the work and mirth of life are done. To Wordsworth, on the other hand, Nature is an ideal thing, *a religion*. He thought that men were created to see the earth. The whole of nature was to him an exhibition of a great power.

40. Q.—When did Cowper first appear as a poet ? Describe him as a poet.

A.—In 1782 when the first volume of poems was published, he first appeared as a poet. Cowper as a poet was highly original... He was a born poet and not made. He along with Thomson, Gray and Crabbe, introduced a change into the poetic literature of England. His poems are marked with simplicity and originality of thought and description. By him, Romantic type in poetry was substituted for the classical one. His style is natural and almost colloquial differing from the pompous and artificial style of Pope.

41. Q.—'Cowper took no inconsiderable part in the two revivals' :—Explain it.

A.—The two revivals referred to are *literary* and *religious*. Cowper took considerable part in both the revivals :—

He was one of those who first introduced the change which brought English poetry to truth and simplicity from the pomp and artificiality of the school of Pope. He was also the great poet of the religious revival which marked the latter part of the 18th century in England; and which was called Evangelicism within and Methodism without. This Religious Revival aimed at the re-establishment of religion and morality in the masses of the population. It improved the condition of the church by breaking the lethargy of the clergy. Cowper was the poetical exponent of this moral and religious movement; he was in this way associated with Wesley and Whitefield as well as with the philanthropists of the movement such as Wilberforce, Wornton and Clarkson.

42. Q.—What poets did Cowper imitate in the style of the Task ? What incident gave birth to the poem ?

A.—Cowper in a letter tells Unwin that his descriptions in the Task are all from nature. He has imitated none in his numbers. Though he does not seem to have borrowed his descriptious from any book, still it is true that he has imitated Milton and Thomson as regards rhyme and phraseology in the Task.

The incident that gave rise to the poem 'Task' :—Being urged by Lady Austen, who was fond of the blank verse of Milton, to write a new poem in blank verse, Cowper replied "I will, if you will give a subject." 'Oh,' said she. "You can write on any subject; write on this sofa." The whole poem, the Task that grew out of the *Sofa*, is so called because it was a task imposed upon him by his friend, Lady Austen.

43. Q.—What was Cowper's opinion of great cities ?

A.—Although cultivated life is conducive to the formation of character and the growth of human virtue, yet that in great cities, specially those devoted to commerce loses much of the salubrious influence, it would exert for all that is noble and magnanimous, humane and divine, in more quiet and peaceful country towns. The city is mostly the

resort of the scum of the society, the asylum of the most degraded of human beings; like a oasis in the desert, it may, sometimes, boast of a microscopic group of either men of letters or of art but its influence seldom reaches the vast population that is absorbed in the pursuit of foul gain or filthy pleasure. The human mind, prone to imitation, loses, in such a Babylon, its native innocence, and yields a ready prey to the fascination of vice which it could hardly have practised in the sequestered society of a rural town, rife with public opinion; a man is but an insignificant unit in a gigantic city having but a rare chance for either the reproach of a friend or the observation of a neighbour; hence, vice is as easy of accomplishment as of concealment. The abundance of wealth, in a city, is the progenitor not only of indolence and ease but of an insatiable appetite, and unpardonable wantonness. The poet beautifully concludes the train of his reflections by

"......and Virtue taught
By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there
Beyond the achievement of successful flight."
[ll. 690-2.]

44. Q.—Amplify the following:

(1) God made the country, man made the town.
(2) By ceaseless action all that is, subsists.
(3) Who oftenest sacrifice, are favoured least.

A.—(1) The country is installed in the very lap of nature which is nothing but the manifestation of the Creator Himself. God does not personally reveal Himself to us, but through nature, the true interpreter of the divine, in all its awe, sublimity and majesty, on the one hand, its love, grace and mercy on the other. Nature is the seat of the most awe-inspiring phenomena, at the same time, the most affectionate nurse to soothe, and heal the human mind. She inspires us with her native grandeur and solemnity, animates us with her liveliness, purifies us with her innocence and bathes us in dripping sympathy, by her love. The maternity of the Godhood has been attributed to her by both the bards and thinkers of the East. When man deserts such a Nature and his abode in her bosom for the gain, the opulence and the magnificence of a city, he wilfully shuts himself out of her inspiration, enters a counterfeit creation of

his own, and necessarily ejects himself from all that is really delightful, charming and instructive, To be more homely, he really forsakes virtue for the red-brick, and, music, for the din of iron.

(2) Nature listens to no pause which, in her, is nothing but nullity and death. Every atom, every molecule, in nature, is in a state of either formation or action. There is nothing in her that halts. The heart beats, even, in the utmost depth of our slumber; every nerve, every sinew every corpuscle is at work! The planets never cease to rotate; days, months, seasons recur punctually at their time. The whole of nature is one unique manifestation of ceaseless action, continual transformation, and growth. The seas, lakes and rivers retain their freshness by the flow and ebb of the tide, the breeze, its sweetness, by blowing', men, their health, vigour and energy, by exercise. Even nations and individuals cannot continue in prosperity and power, if by ceaseless action they do not endeavour, not only, to retain, but enhance them. The cause of decay, everywhere, no matter whether it is in nature, man, art, commerce, civilisation or science is inaction, inertness and the insuperable aversion to work.

(3) Ease is a peculiar goddess. She, often, assumes a vindictive attitude towards those of her votaries that sacrifice their time and money, their life and limb at her altar. Her blessings are extended to those alone, that seek her the least and remain at a considerable distance from her temple. Man must not seek ease in either the repose on the couch, the quiet solitude of the closet or the drawing-room. He must not loll in a coach and pair in her quest but turn out from every position of so-called comfort and quiet, and vigorously embrace the active pursuits of life that would ultimately afford him the ease he seeks. The idler that seeks ease, at the cost of his constitution, simply subjects himself to premature decay and death, and, if he is not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, as they say, is likely to starve himself and his.

45. Q.—What do you know of Cowper as a social satirist?

A.—*Vide* Introduction page 34.

46. Q.—Give a short biography of Cowper as you can trace it in the Sofa, on the following heads:—

(1) His boyhood, (2) His walks, (3) His friend, (4) His patriotism, (5) His religion.

A.—(1) The very boyhood of Cowper reveals to us his characteristic fondness for the exquisite scenes of nature in quest of which he would not hesitate to traverse beyond the limited confines of his seminary, and rove a truant

"O'er hills, through valleys, and by river's brink."
*   *   *   *   *
T' enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames."
Satiating the appetite that his rambles would generate by
"...Scarlet-hips and stony hews,
On blushing crabs, or berries that emboss
The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere." [ll. 113-122.]

(2) These wanderingss were not confined to his boyhood; they never lost their zest with Cowper who kept them up in fair weather or foul both for pleasure and exercise, of the latter of which he was a warm advocate. Hills, dales and river banks, in short every possible strip of ground that promised to charm the vision or the senses never failed to be visited by this passionate lover of landscapes. He invokes Mrs. Unwin to bear testimony to his devotion to nature. He advocated the change of scene and there was not a spot about Olney that he would not explore wanding through mire, moss and mole hills.

(3) The friends with whom Cowper was inseparably connected were Mrs. Unwin the constant companion of his walks, and the Throckmortons who lent him the use of their grounds and parks.

(4) The demoralisation and degeneracy of his time grieved him sorely, and produced in him apprehensions of the loss of the empire England then commanded, the separation from her of the American colonies having greatly augmented them.

(5) Cowper was deeply religious by nature and a strenuous advocate of social purity. Throughout the *Sofa* he pleads his cause, and in London we find him

earnestly lamenting the non-observance of the sabbath-rite, the subversion of religion and the universal godlessness of her vast population.

47. Q.—Illustrate Cowper's patriotism by quotations from the text.

A.—(1) "........Folly such as yours,

*   *   *   *   *

A mutilated structure, soon to fall."—[ll. 770-74.]

(2)........More prompt

*   *   *   *

The wealth of Indian provinces, escapes.—[ll. 730-38.]

48. Q.—To whom do the following lines refer ?

(1) The gentle savage.
(2) The Fair commands the song.
(3) Dear companions of my walk.
(4) The lord of the enclosed demesne.

A.—The first refers to Omai, the South sea Islander who had been brought over to England for exhibition ; the second, to Lady Austen who suggested the composition of the Sofa ; the third, to Mrs. Unwin who was the constant companion of his walks ; the fourth, to Lord Throckmorton who lent him the use of his grounds.

49. Q.—Who was Benevolus, and why was he so named ?

A.—John Courtney Throckmorton Esq. of Weston Underwood was styled Benevolus for lending Cowper the use of his grounds.

50. Q.—"Cowper is pre-eminently the poet of the country." Justify this remark with quotations from the text.

A.—Cowper was a sturdy champion of the superiority of the country over the city life. His pictures of rural

scenery can never be surpassed for truth and picturesqueness. The following will well illustrate this peculiar gift of the poet.

(a) "God made the country, and man made the town,
* * * *
And least be threatened in the fields and groves?"
(ll. 749-753).

(b) "Our groves were planted to console at noon,
* * * *
Scared, and th'offended nightingale is mute".
(ll. 760-768).

(c) "Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds
* * * *
The tone of languid nature."... (ll. 181-183).

(d) "Thou know'st my praise of nature most sincere—
* * * *
But genuine. ... ..."
(ll. 150-253).

51. Q.—Quote passages from your text to illustrate the pictorial power of Cowper.

A.—The fascinating realism, conspicuous everywhere in Cowper's descriptions, lends them the charm of a faithful, graphic pen-picture. As Messrs. Webb and Aldis in their *Handbook of English Literature* say: "Cowper's poems contain truthful and picturesque descriptions of scenes of existing everyday life." He carries this trait even to the domain of the emotions. The following quotations from the text will illustrate this great gift of the poet:

(a) Here Ouse slow winding through a level plain,
* * * *
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;
(ll. 163-166).

(b) That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,
* * * *
The sloping land recedes into the clouds.
(ll. 170-171).

(c) ......"Square tow'r,
* * * *
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote."
(ll. 173-176).

(d) (*In the matter of the emotions :*)
" His cheek recovers soon its healthful hue,
* * * *
He walks, he leaps, he runs.—is wing'd with joy,
And riots in the sweets of every breeze."
(ll. 441-444).

52. Q.—What is meant by Pathetic Fallacy? Quote instances from the Sofa.

A.—*Pathetic Fallacy* consists in attributing human feelings to inanimate objects. As for example :—

(a) "Not distant far, a length of colonnade
Invites us." (ll. 252-253).

(b) "We pass a gulf, in which the willows dip
Their pendant boughs, stooping as if to drink."
(ll. 268-869).

53. Q.—State Cowper's opinion as to the social conditions under which men attain the greatest happiness and moral excellence. What account does he give of the poets, and the kind of poetry that pleased him most in his boyhood?

A.—Civilised life passed in a country is. according to Cowper, the only condition in which men attain the greatest happiness and moral excellence.

Cf. "Man in society is like a flower
Blown in its native bed :' tis there alone
His faculties, expanded in full bloom,
Shine out ; there only reach their proper use."

Love of nature was inherent in Cowper. Poets who sang of Nature were very dear to him. "No bard could please me but whose lyre was tuned to Nature's praises,' says Cowper.

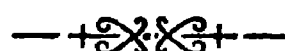
THE SOFA.



University and other Test Questions with Hints of Answers.

THE SOFA.

University and other Test Questions with Hints of Answers.



1. Give the dates of Cowper's birth and death, and the year when the Task was published. In what metre is the Task written?

2. Paraphrase the passage (Book I. *l.* 749-61).

3. Give the meaning of the following words:—

   Vermicular, Crewel, Arthritic, Culinary, Sinuous, Wain, Umbrageous Penury, Vortiginons, Foible, Homoge—neal, Oscitancy.

   Give briefly the meaning of the following passages:—

   a. "Then thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
   The livelong night."

   b. "The obsolete prolixity of shade."

   c. "By ceaseless action all that is subsists."

   d. "———the unscented fictions of the loom."

   e. "———————a tawny skin,
   The vellum of the pedigree they claim."

   f. "————————The sylvan scene
   Migrates uplifted."

5. Parse the words :—

   (*a*) Whom, That, long, *l.* 491 ; (*b*) That, *l.* 494 ; (*c*) Dayspring overshoot, *l.* 496.

6. Explain the following expressions :—

   (*a*) Two kings of Brentford ; (*b*) "The smutched artificer ;" (*c*) "Dreams illusive of philosophy; (*d*) Nurtured in the shades of Academus."

7. How does Cowper describe London in the 1st book of the Task?

8. [See Book I. *l.* 700-704]. Who were Reynolds Bacon and Chatham.

[*a*] "Ausonia's groves." [*b*] "Has Epictetus, Plato, Tully, preached?" [*c*] "Our habits, costlier than Lucullus wore."

For what modern country is Ausonia the Classical name? Who were Epictetus, Plato, and Tully. Who was Lucullus?

9. Write out any passage of the Task of not less than twenty consecutive lines.

10. Explain the occasion of the writing of the Task and the origin of the name.

11. Paraphrase the lines [Book I. *l.* 367-84].

a. Put a noun in the possessive for *its own* of 372.

b. Give the different meanings of the word *instance*, and form a sentence for each.

c. Treat the word *element* in the same way

d. Give the derivation of *undulation*; what other word means the same?

12. Parse the words :—All, *l.* 367; that *l.* 369; while, *l.* 371; else noxious, *l.* 375; Frowning, *l.* 381; what, *l.* 383 and fixed, *l.* 384.

13. Give the meaning of the following :—

[*a.*] Book I. *l.* 334-35; [*b*] Book I. *l.* 58-59; [*c*] Book I. *l* 259-61.

14. Parse the words :—

Self-deprived, spread, waste, and without, in the extract from *l.* 259-61.

15. Analyse the passage [Book I. *l.* 177-80.]

16. Parse the passage [Book I. *l.* 248-49.]

17. Explain the meaning, and give if you can the derivation of the following words, taken from Book I :—

Cleft, Twilight, Obdurate, Molten, Prolixity, Demesne, Palmistry.

18. State very briefly, and in your own words the substance of Cowper's reflections on [*a*] *The Gipsies* [*b*] *London.*

19. Express the full meaning of the passage [Book I. *l.* 422-27.]

20. Write an analysis of the passage [Book I. 422-27]:—

21. Parse the following words in the passage [Book I. 422-27] :—

None more, who, me, which, wine, throws, more, than place, Nature every sense.

22. *a.* Paraphrase the passage (Task I. *l.* 181—96).

b. What example of antithesis occurs in it? Mark the words on which emphasis would be laid in reading.

c. Give the syntax of the following words :

Branches, *l.* 188, All, *l.* 189 ; Chiming *l.* 193 ; and That, *l.* 195.

d. Scan the line 182, 189, and 192, Task I.

e. What is the meaning of *tone* in the line 183.

23. Give simple expressions equivalent to the following:—

Silly circumvention—histrionic mummery—ignorance in stilts—pampered appetite obscene—capricious in attire—the rivelled lips of toothless, bald decrepitude—the bias of the purpose—the head of modest and ingenuous worth—precedence went in truck?

24. Give the exact force of the words in Italics:—

The mind of *desultory* man—with *nice* incision of her guided steel—a more *accomplished* world's chief glory now—as *roundly* as she may...forth steps the *spruce* philosopher...lulled by *magic* sounds...extreme in dress.

25. What are the chief defects of Cowper's poetry? Refer to any passages you can remember in illustration.

26. Explain the meaning of the connection of the passages:—(Book I. *l.* 341-43); and (385-86).

27. Analyse the Extract Book I. *l.* 183-189.

28. In the passage from *l.* 181-196.

a. Parse the word alone (*l.* 181], that [*l.* 184]; unnumbered [*l.* 188].

b. In what case is the word 'branches' [*l*. 188.]

c. Compare the words 'rural' [*l*. 181], 'less' [*l*. 190].

d Conjugate the words 'wind' [*l*. 186], 'lose' [*l*. 174].

29. Explain the passage (Task, Book I, *l*. 570-73).

Complete in your own words the description which the author gives of the class of people referred to. What part of speech is *clean* ? l. 571]; What does it mean ?

30. Give in simple language the full meaning of the passages (*a*) Book I. *l*. 409-411 ; (*b*) *l*. 749.

31. Give a summary of the chief events of Cowper's life; and the date of the publication of the Task.

32. Characterise the genius and poetic style of Cowper.

33. Divide Cowper's life into periods. State in which of these periods "the Task" was composed and under what influences.

34. Show how the varied experiences of the poet are gathered up in this happiest effort of his muse.

35. To what causes does the poem owe its popularity? Mention what you consider to be the finest parts of it; and give your reasons.

36. Give a general and connected analysis of *The Task I*. Ans :—(*Vide* Introduction page 25).

37. What was the origin of the Sofa ? Account for the title. Ans :—(*Vide* Introduction page 23).

38. State concisely what Cowper thinks of :—*Solitude ; great cities* ; *Art ; Civilized Society ; physical exercise* ; *gaiety*.

39. Criticise and illustrate from the text (*i*) Cowper's pictorial power and (*ii*) His love of nature.

Ans :—(*Vide* Model Questions pages 179-180).

40. "The Nature he loved was of the firm domesticated kind, rather than the Nature of the rugged mountain of the primeval forest." Criticise this statement of Messrs. Webb and Aldis on Cowper.

Ans :—(*Vide* Introduction page 17).

41. Describe Cowper as a social satirist with special reference to the society of his time.

*42. Can the *Task* boast of any coherent, regular plan ?

43. Describe after Cowper how *the three legged stool* developed into the *Sofa* ?

44. What was Cowper's connexion with the classical and the Romantic schools of English poetry ?

45. Give the substance of Cowper's description of the the following: (*i*) the story of the crazed Kate; (*ii*) a gipsy encampment; (*iii*) the thresher at his work; (*iv*) the ennui of a life of pleasure; (*v*) the landscape viewed from the alcove; (*vi*) a mariner suffering from a calenture; and (*vii*) the weather house.

46. Point out some instances of Cowper's fondness for Latinism and criticise it. Name some other English authors who are similarly fond of Latinisim.

47. Compare Milton, Gray, Cowper and Wordsworth as Nature poets.

Ans:—(*Vide* Introduction pages 18-19).

48. What aspect of Cowper as a writer is meant by the phrase "the divine chit-chat of Cowper?"

Ans:—(*Vide* Introduction page 34).

49. Draw up a life of Cowper as revealed in the poem.

50. How does Cowper's love of his country manifest itself in his writings ?

51. "It is now felt that the literature of any given people must be an organic growth influenced by its external surroundings, and by the historical devolopment of that people." Criticise Cowper as a poet in the light of this statement of Mr. C. H. Tawney. What part do Cowper's poems play in the growth of the English literature ?

52. Quote instances of the following figures from the text: Alliteration; Pathetic Fallacy; Metonymy; Metaphor; Transferred Epithet; and Oxymoron.

53. What was the influence of Lady Austen upon Cowper ?

54. In what metre is the Task written ? Scan any two lines.

16. Explain fully the following :—

(*a*) The spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns.—[l. 455]

(*b*) Silly circumvention, unrelenting hate.—[l. 615]

(*c*) The obsolete prolixity of shade.—[l. 265.]

(*d*) ....The guiltless eye
Commits no wrong, nor wastes what it enjoys.—
[ll. 333-334.]

(*e*) With curvature of slow and easy sweep—
Deception innocent—give ample space
To narrow bounds. ... ... [ll. 352-354.]

(*f*) ....But the monarch owes
His firm stability to what he scorns—
More fixed below, the more disturbed above.
[ll. 382-384.]

(*g*) Conveys a distant country into mine,
And throws Italian light on English walls.—[ll. 424-425.]

(*h*) And virtue, taught
By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there.
Beyond the achievement of successful flight.
[ll. 690-992.]

(*i*) There, touch'd by Reynolds, a dull blank becomes
A lucid mirror, in which nature sees
All her reflected features. Bacon there
Gives more than female beauty to a stone.
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips.—[ll. 700-703.]

(*j*) Folly such as yours
Graced with a sword, and worthier of a fan
Has made, which enemies could ne'er have done,
Our arch of empire, steadfast but for you,
A mutilated structure, soon to fall.—[770-795]

(*k*) But he, that puts
Into his overgorged and bloated purse
The wealth of Indian provinces, escapes.—[ll. 736-738.]

(*l*) Here virtue thrives as in her proper soil;
Not rude and surly, and beset with thorns,
And terrible to sight, as when she springs,
(If e'er she springs spontaneous) in remote

And barbarous climes, where violence prevails
And strength is lord of all ; but gentle kind,
By culture tamed, by liberty refreshed
And all her fruits by radiant truth matured.
[ll. 600-607.]

(*m*) The love of Nature, and the scenes she draws,
Is Nature's dictate.—[ll. 412-13.]

(*n*) Reproach their owner with that love of rest,
To which he forfeits even the rest he loves.—[ll. 394-5.]

(*o*) So sit two kings of Brentford on one throne
And so two citizens who take the air,
Close-packed and smiling in a chaise and one.
[ll. 78-80.]

(*p*) So slow
The growth of what is excellent, so hard
To attain perfection in this nether world.—[ll. 84-5.]

(*q*) While admiration feeding at the eye,
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene !—[ll. 157-58].

(*r*) Th' elastic spring of an unwearied foot
That mounts the stile with ease, or leaps the fence,
That play of lungs inhaling and again
Respiring freely the fresh air, that makes
Swift pace or steep ascent no toil to me,
Mine have not pilfered yet.—[ll. 135-40.]

(*s*) Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
The livelong night.—[ll. 200-1.]

(*t*) Thanks to Benevolus—he spares me yet
Those chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines,
And, though himself so polished, still reprieves
The obsolete prolixity of shade.—[ll. 262-65.]

(*u*) He, not unlike the great ones of mankind,
Disfigures earth, and plotting in the dark,

Toils much to earn a monumental pile,
That may record the mischiefs he has done.
[ll. 274-77.]

(v) So strong the zeal t' immortalize himself
Beats in the breast of man, that even a few
Few transient years, won from the abyss abhorr'd
Of blank oblivion, seem a glorious prize,
And even to a clown. [ll. 284-88.]

(w) Between them weeps
A little Naiad her impoverish'd urn
All summer long, which winter fills again.—[ll. 327-29.]

(x) While beneath
The chequer'd earth seems restless as a flood
Brush'd by the wind. (So sportive is the light
Shot though the boughs, it dances as they dance,
Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,
And dark'ning and enlight'ning, as the leaves
Play wanton, every moment, every spot.—[ll. 343-49.]

(y) 'Tis the primal curse,
But soften'd into, mercy; made the pledge
Of cheerful days, and nights without a groan.
[ll. 364-66.]

(z) Constant rotation of th' unwearied wheel
That Nature rides upon, maintains her health
Her beauty, her fertility.—[ll. 368-70.]

55. Trace Milton's influence on Cowper's poetry.

56. In what peculiar sense does Cowper use the following words in the *Task*.

Fashion; *Induced*; *cipher*; *obdurate*; *austere*; *studious ancy*; *Indulges*; *fictious*; *secure*; *privileged*; *noxious*: *remote* and *prize*.

57. Explain, referring to the context, the following lines :—

(*a*) Lull the spirit, while they fill the mind.

(*b*) Delusive most, where warmest wishes are

(*c*) The vellum of the pedigree they claim.

(*d*) There is a public mischief in your mirth.

(*e*) Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal.

58. Write notes on the following :—

A twisted form vermicular; *crewel*; *pampered appetite obscene*; *undepraved by culinary arts*; *conjured up to serve occasions of poetic pomp*; *whose novelty survive long knowledge*; *alcove*; *speculative height*; *arthritic*; *feculence*.
